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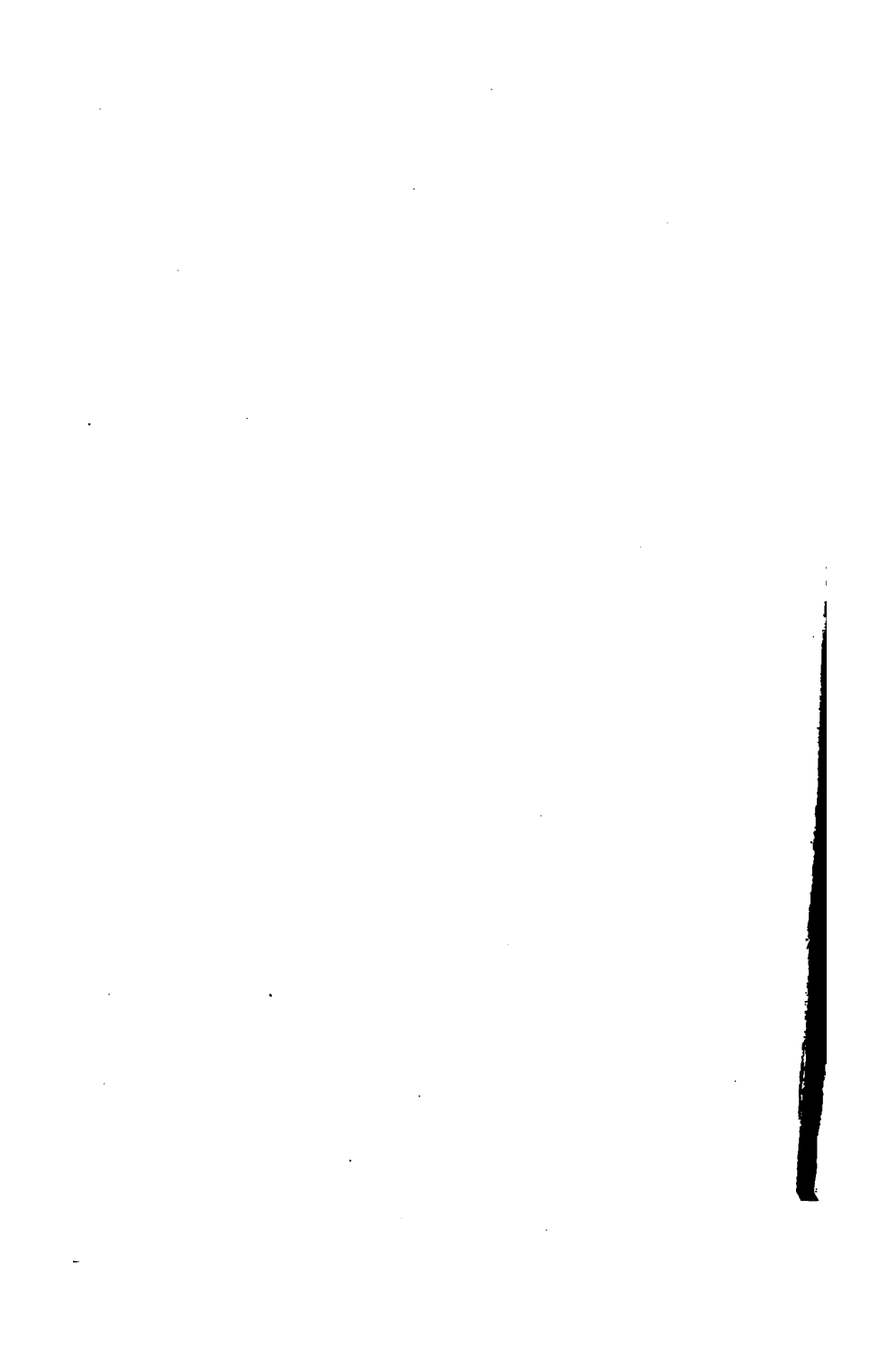
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HELPING HERSEY

The BARONESS
VON HUTTEN

HELPING HERSEY

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VON HUTTEN

HELPING HERSEY

BY

The BARONESS VON HUTTEN^{zum Stolzev}

AUTHOR OF "PAM," "HAPPY HOUSE,"
"KINGSMEADE," ETC.

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B. v. H.

1923

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TRANSFER FROM C. D.

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HELPING HERSEY

PETERL IN THE BLACK FOREST

Written in 1913,

I

THE LITTLE ENGLISH

PETERL is long, blonde, with legs of an absurd thinness and straw-coloured hair. Physically he is fifteen, but there are moments when his English mother asks herself, is it not seventeen, or even twenty, rather than fifteen years ago, that after a very unpleasant night, they laid him in her arms and told her that he was an heir?

Not a boy, mark you, nor a son, but an heir. She had in that particular instance, at least, done her duty!

And with much pomp and circumstance he was christened. Christened Karl Peter Christopher Henry David. He wept during the ceremony, and his foolish young mother was sure in her outlandish heart that he wept under the weight of all these serious historic names.

And with the silliness and wrong-headedness so characteristic of her obnoxious race, she promptly re-named him Peterl, which is pronounced *Payterl*, and is not a German little name at all, but a Tyrolese.

Thus, outwardly, he is explained.

But who can explain the result of his cross-breeding? His abnormal placidity of demeanour, broken by gurgles of five-year-old laughter; his hatred of sport, so appalling to his bewildered she-parent, and the artistic appreciation of nature so much greater than her own; his

childish objection to an exaggerated use of soap and water; his well-weighed opinions in matters of politics, international as well as German, and his perilous greed in pastry!

Every boy is, of course, a fascinating mystery to his mother, but Peterl and his mother, who meet only semi-occasionally, have for each other the added charm of semi-strangeness; almost the charm of an attractive man for an attractive woman for each other.

Therefore when the party—five, including the Irish maid—got into the train at Mannheim and began the journey up into the Black Forest, there was for the Frau Gräfin and *der junge* Herr Graf, a delightful sense of adventure in the air. It was owing to illness, and the exigencies of travel, nearly a year since they had met, and a year is an extremely long time to a youth of fifteen and a lady of just short of forty. Peterl's disgrace with his father was deep. His school report had been of a blackness hardly to bear contemplation. He was not only the last in each of his classes, but he had been impertinent to his masters, a glutton, and terrifically untidy. Also his mother knew that he had been in debt. Debt to the extent of eight shillings.

This crime had, for reasons of diplomacy, been concealed from his father, but epistolarily communicated to his mother, who had cabled the money to his school. Perhaps this guilty secret was an added bond between the two. [And this is one of the vast basic differences between a mother and a father. Such a secret surely never yet has created an extra tie between a *Father* and his Son!]

And so here they were in the train, four people bearing the same name, all good friends, although that mighty engine, the German Law, had long since confirmed the separation between the parents, that national-

ity, education and temperament had years before begun.

The little sister of Peterl, a pretty golden-haired child of eleven, ate chocolate and read a German book; Peterl does not eat chocolate because to him, as to his mother, that comestible is a forerunner of nettlerash. Neither was he reading—because his mind was in an irresistible ferment of excitement.

He and his mother were both thrilled to the marrow by each other's presence, although experience had taught them that such thrills are best concealed.

So they sat solemnly opposite each other, politely including the other members of the party in most of their remarks, while at the same time the brown eyes of the mother and the pale blue, black-lashed ones of the son carrying on an enchanting and most romantic conversation.

The other occupant of the carriage was a little English girl who had made friends with Peterl in the following manner—

The train was crowded and the mother had hurried the two children into that compartment, and sat down opposite an old lady of untempting aspect, who spoke.

The old lady. This is a ladies' compartment.

The mother (very agreeably). Yes, I see.

The old lady (glaring at Peterl). The young man——

The mother (giggling because she really couldn't help it). But surely my son can do no harm? He is only fifteen!

Then ensued general laughter, in which the old lady joined, becoming thus rather charming and quite friendly. At the first outburst Peterl and the English girl caught each other's eye, and a minute later she spoke to him: telling him that he had dropped and forgotten his umbrella, his gloves, his fountain pen, and an old rag

of a red rose he had stuck in his buttonhole at Frankfurt.

Later, when the old lady had got out and the father and the Irish maid had joined the others, the English girl and Peterl exchanged information. But not before he had whispered to his mother, "She looks nice, the little English, I will converse with her."

And thus they talked in an undertone, as the Herr Graf was asleep.

The little English. You are English?

Peterl. Only a half. My mother is, you see, and my father is German. You are English?

The little English. How do you know?

Peterl (in his softest voice and with a little crooked smile of wisdom). But dat one can see! Where are you going?

The little English. Home to Switzerland.

Peterl. If you are English, why do you live in Switzerland?

The little English. I don't know. We moved there when I was only three.

Peterl thinks visibly for several seconds and then says: "Possibly your mamma could not stand the climate at home? My mamma could not."

Then they exchanged compliments in the shape of biscuits and acid drops, and she told him about her school; and his mother saw in his eye that he was about to tell her that his mamma was the world-distinguished author, Gräfin Blank.

Mother. Don't you dare, you little brute.

Peterl (bursting with wide-mouthed laughter). How did you know, Mamma?

Mother. As if I didn't know everything!

When the party reached Tilsee, each member of it was tired; the father was anxious about the motor-drive and

whether any one would seize the opportunity to take cold, the mother cross with fatigue—didn't dare speak for fear of snapping; the little sister was sleepy and had ants in her legs; and Peterl, as pale as a ghost, sits with his long eyes reduced to slits and has no word for any man.

Only half-way up the steep, beautiful road, he says in a deep chest voice: "Mamma, she was rather handsome, the little *English!*"

II

THE LITTLE COTTAGE IN REGENT STREET

The Inn, that of The Star, is packed with middle-class Germans, many of them obviously of Hebrew extraction.

On the first day Peterl, in the wood, after what he calls food-time, says with mild disgust: "What very dull-looking peoples."

His mother. Think so?

Peterl. The wives are all fat, and the men have no hairs; they are mostly ridiculous.

His mother. And what do you suppose they thought of us when we came in at supper last night?

Peterl (his eyes spread in his head in anticipation of something funny). What then?

His mother. Probably "Good gracious!" or "Lieber Gott! look at those people—the woman as tall as a house, with untidy red hair, and that boy with spider legs and a face like a cream cheese. How dull they look!"

Peterl (chop-fallen, but amused). Do you really think so, Mamma? Do we really look dull?

His mother (unveraciously and convincingly). *You* do, at all events.

Peterl (utterly unconvinced, in consideration). Oh,

you funny wife! [He had yet to learn that whereas "Frau" means both woman and wife, wife only means one thing. His mother knew that it was her duty to enlighten him on this point, but couldn't quite make up her mind to do so.]

Peterl. Are you writing a book now?

His mother. Y-yes; but not very fast.

Peterl. (dreaming). I, too, have writed—wie sagt man, wrotten?—a little tale, in English.

His mother (with the seriousness due from one literary man to another). Indeed? What is it about?

Peterl. Hear the wind crying in the trees! Oh, my tale. Well, it is about a junges Ehepaar—young married couple—who live in London. They have a beautiful little cottage in Regent Street.

His mother. Oh!

Peterl. Why do you laugh?

His mother explained that owing to a deplorable lack of taste on the part of the L.C.C. there were no beautiful little cottages in Regent Street.

And then as Peterl, listening to the cry of the wind in the trees, forgets to go on with his synopsis, her mind loiters along a path opened by the married couple in London. Imagine, say, next door to Vickery's a little cottage in a garden, where grow hollyhocks and sweet-williams. A clump of lavender scents the air, and over the door is trained a crimson Rambler. . . . How that cottage of Peterl's would improve London.

A row of Queen Anne almshouses in Piccadilly would prove of exquisite embellishment, too, and a Georgian Inn with a creaking sign, and a gallery courtyard would charm the eye, say, in Northumberland Avenue.

Aerial architecture has great charms, so for a long time Peterl and his mother sat on their fallen log, in

the sunny clearing on the slope, and both of them built busily.

Peterl (with suddenness). But if there were cottages in Regent Street, and you and I lived in one [with an air of the most romantic inspiration], we would keep a pig!

III

THE VIEW

Peterl. Mamma, to-day I did view such a beautiful see.

His mother. You did what?

Peterl. I did view a beautiful see; all the mountains were blue, and the meadows so green—and in the meadows were seven highly polished crows.

His mother. Yes, crows do look varnished, don't they? But you meant to say, "I did *see* a beautiful *view*."

Peterl. Thanks. Only To see and To view are equivalent, l'un de l'autre, and therefore I ask myself why cannot I say I viewed a see, as well as I seed a view?

His mother. Oh, good gracious, Peterkin!

Peterl. And there were large pale cows, too, browsing in the meadows.

IV

THE OLD PEOPLE

"That old people is not very charmants, I find, Mamma," *Peterl* began jerking his chin explanatorily towards a cantankerous old couple, who spent all their time snapping at each other.

His mother. No, not very *charmant, en effet*.

Peterl. It is a pity. *Alte Leute* should be beautiful together.

His mother. Yes, dear—they should be. So should *junge Leute*.

Peterl. Yes, but age is very nice when—when it is. Do you remember “Les Vieux” in *Lettres de mon moulin*?

His mother. Tiens, tu lis de Daudet, mon fils.

Peterl. Of course. Do you remember “Les Vieux”?

His mother (untruthfully). No—no.

Peterl. It is a man who is sended by his friend to see his grandparents—the friends I mean, because the friend is à *Paris*, and there they are, the old ones, each in his chair, in the quiet room with the *pendule faisant tic-toc, tres lentement*, and they say always of their great—son in Paris. “Is he not a good fellow?” [It is impossible to put on paper the tenderness of the child’s voice as he imitates the sentiment of those old people. “Is he not a goo-od fellow!”]

His mother. Ah, yes, I begin to remember——

Peterl. And then *les cerises en cognac* which the old lady has forgotten to put in the sugar, but the visitor ate *quand même*. It is a beautiful story—only it is but a story——

His eyes are fixed dreamily, and his voice trails into silence. He is visualising Daudet’s beautiful little scene. And happy in so doing. Yet his hands are rather dirty and his stockings hang loose on his thin legs.

Can it be that he is going to be a poet?

V

GOOD-BYE

Peterl. Also Mamma, *Morgen ist’s aus!*

His mother. Yes, dear; to-morrow it is over. You go home and I go to Switzerland.

Peterl. I wish——

His mother. Yes, so do I—but we can't, you know.

Peterl. No.

His mother. You'll write often.

Peterl (in his deepest new voice). *Sehr* oft, Mamma. You see—I sometimes wish I could come to England and live with you.

His mother (briskly). But you can't, son. That would be absurd. You see, you are a German——

Peterl. I know—only—sometimes my English half is loudest, and I think towards my *mozzer*—country, and—I know I am a German, but it is not my fault—but when I'm a man and have done my military *sairvice*—*alors!*

His mother. Oh, *alors*——

This all happened five years ago, but Peter's mother still says to herself *alors*——

IN LOVING MEMORY—

“DAKIN”

IN Loving Memory of my true friend Jane—Jenny Dakin, who died sixty-five years ago to-day, and angelic and peerless, aged twenty-one.

“Pure in heart and exquisite in soul.
Your mind as beauteous as your face.
Your memory shall never die.”

WILLIAM.

Appleage Rectory.

Looking out over the leads through the translucent murk of the spring evening, John Latton stood, the morning *Times* in his hand, his cooling pipe drooping from one side of his mouth. He was too busy a man to read in the mornings anything but the news sheets of the daily papers.

The Scrutator of the *Evening Epoch* must, of course, know the events of the day, but he read nothing else until his own article was corrected and handed in and he was back in the dingy rooms he called home. Thus during and after his evening meal his was the luxury of going through the pages of one or two of the better morning papers, discovering and pondering over the very good bits of writing, which we in England are so used to receiving with our bacon and eggs that we hardly appreciate them. John Latton had had a hard day, and his thin, bitter face was white and leaden marks showed round his eyes. It was a Saturday for which he thanked God; to-morrow he could rest body and brain, thus

strengthening himself for writing on Monday the necessary column for Monday six o'clock edition. He could write on pretty well any subject under the sun; his queer out-of-the-way knowledge derived from solid erudition, brightened by a power of observation that amounted to genius, was such that from his pen an article on Icelandic tithes, on cement, or Court scandals in Cappadocia, esoteric Buddhisms, or anything else evolved with equal ease. He had a vast admiring public, but only one man knew how unutterably tired he was at times; how hopeless the next day's work often seemed to him as he went to bed. And to-night he was even more weary than usual. His back ached, his eyes burned, and what he himself recognised as the worst symptom of all—his brain was empty.

He was a man of very delicate constitution, but he hardly realised this, and, like many courageous delicate people, he believed himself to be lazy, but to-night he knew that he was really over-tired and decided that he would only read a few minutes before going to bed. Taking up *The Times*, he glanced at the first page and his eyes fell on the "In Memoriam" to Jane Dakin. "Dead sixty-five years ago to-day," he murmured aloud. In his extreme fatigue it comforted him to think of this woman who for so many years had been resting.

He read the queerly worded memorial over again, touched by its pathos, amused by its attempt at poetry, and perhaps because he was very over-tired he did that unusual thing, dream of something of which he had unconsciously been thinking just before he had been going to sleep. He dreamed that after endless difficulties he had forced himself into a village church a dark rainy day and stood listening to the funeral service of Dame Dakin. The coffin was open, and he could see her face—the face of almost holy beauty. By her, holding her

left hand, gazing at her with adoring eyes as if she was alive, stood "William," who seemed quite naturally to be no other than the notorious old evil liver, Latton's Uncle Branksome.

Latton had not thought of his uncle for years, and the last occasion was one that even now caused him pain, bitter anger and shame. Once, years before, in an extremity of illness and poverty, Latton had appealed to his mother's only brother, who was a very rich man, for help in the shape of a loan, and his letter was answered by blank silence. So that Sunday morning as he ate his solitary breakfast and recalled his dream, there was a grim humour in his face. "Old William" in his Applecage Rectory would, he knew, faint with horror of the dream if he knew anything about the other so different old man. Somehow the thought of William and his Jenny hovered persistently about Latton all the morning. He thought of these two unknown people as he took his Sunday morning walk in the park, his over-active brain refused to put aside the tormenting vision of them; even as he ate his lunch at a small restaurant William the ancient Rector, he conferred to be a tall, handsome old gentleman with a benign voice and fine hands. There was probably a picture, water-colour sketch, of Jenny Dakin in his study. He imagined her to be dressed in white muslin, very full, such as Lily wore in the small house at Allington. The picture was in an oval frame, and when the sun shone on it the old Rector would sit at his table and dream as he looked at it.

The idea was becoming, Latton felt irritably, almost an obsession, and taking a book from his pocket he propped it up against the water-bottle and tried to read.

It was impossible! The words meant nothing to him. He could only think of Jenny Dakin and her William. In those days, sixty-five years ago, William had been a

young curate; he wore a stock and fasted on a Friday, and Jenny carried things in a small basket to the poor, and he waylaid her in the lanes and walked home with her; and then one bright winter's morning they were married, and the village children sniffed and blew their little noses during the ceremony; and they had children and the first one died. Latton called for his bill impatiently and shambled quickly out into the sun. His head was so tired that he could not control his thoughts, and he knew by experience that the absurd predicament might last for days, and he had once been haunted in the same way by a picture he had seen of a queer old house in Lichfield where Samuel Johnson was born; and in the end he had been obliged to go to Lichfield to lay the ghost.

After half an hour's struggle the harassed man finally gave up, and borrowing an A B C at a big restaurant he looked up Applecage.

Yes, there was such a place—a small village in Hertfordshire. He stood for a moment, book open in his hands, and then closed it with a bang. "It is the only way," he declared defiantly to himself. "I shan't be able to write until I have got the rout of the thing, and perhaps if I change everything a good deal I may be able to write about it—so I'll go."

* * * * *

He left the train and walked through a world of blossom to Applecage. It was only four o'clock as he left the station, and the sun shone splendidly. Tired though he was, Latton was conscious of a faint stirring of his spirit of adventure. He walked on happily enough, his narrow, high-shouldered figure, so plainly the figure of a town dweller, attracting some attention from the rustics he passed; it was obvious that few strangers came that way, and he was glad.

Presently he reached the little brown village, by the curving shallow stream, and stopped on a bridge to speak to an old man who was sunning himself on the parapet.

"Can you tell me the way," he asked, "to the Rectory?"

The old man pointed to where a squat tower rose amongst thick clustered trees.

"And the Rector, what is his name?"

The old man gazed at him with rheumy, milky, blue eyes. "Manders is his name, sir."

"Yes, yes, but his Christian name?"

The old man stared.

"Is his name John or Robert?" persisted Latton.

"Oh, no, no; he is William, like his father before him."

Thanking him, Latton made his way up the little street and turned to the right. "William Manders," he said under his breath. "The real William Manders."

The rose-faced old maidservant opened the door of the little pebble and dash, and at once admitted him.

"Yes, sir. Master is at home," she told him with the cheerful air of servants of an hospitable house.

He followed her down a narrow passage, and she ushered him without further ceremony into the study.

"A gentleman to see, Master," she announced with pleasant civility; and as she closed the door behind him Latton found himself shaking hands with a pleasant-looking, bald-headed man of about sixty.

"I—I beg your pardon," Latton stammered. "I feel—in fact—in fact, I've made," he blurted out suddenly, "an ass of myself."

Mr. Manders laughed. "Dear me, I hope not—but sit down, at least, and tell me about it."

Latton's clothes were shabby and covered with dust; it occurred to him that the Rector might, in his turn, be

making a mistake, and regarded him as some one who had an axe to grind.

"I—I have not come—to ask for anything," he explained hurriedly. "It is only that you—are not the William Manders I expected to see."

The Rector raised his eyebrows kindly. "I am the only man of that name in the Church. However, you look very warm and tired, let me offer you some refreshment."

Under his friendly well-bred manner Latton pulled himself together, and presently he was sitting by the window with a jug of beer between them.

"My name," the younger man announced after a long draught, "is John Latton. I write for the *Evening Epoch*."

Smilingly Mr. Manders pointed to another table, whereon lay a copy of yesterday's edition of that paper. "I have read it for years."

"Good! Well, I am the Scrutator."

The Rector's delight was very pleasant, and it was less nervously that Latton went on with his story.

"I had reason to believe you to be an old, very old man."

"But—who on earth——"

"No one; your name is William?"

The Rector laughed. "It is. I could show you my baptismal certificate."

Latton set down his glass. "I beg your pardon. You must think I am mad. It is simply that I have jumped at conclusions, and come to the wrong place. Although——" He broke off in his perplexity, and walked to the window.

The garden, a large, well-kept one, surrounded by very high clipped hedges, was by this time filled with shadows. Under a big cedar in the middle of the lawn

stood several basket chairs, a rustic table, and an elaborate-looking invalid chair.

"Who," demanded Latton sharply, turning his head to his host, but pointing with one finger towards the cedar, "is that old man?"

Manders rose and walked towards him. "It is," he answered, suppressing his natural surprise with courtesy, "an uncle of my wife's."

"Is—is his name William?" His face was crimson with excitement. His nervous disintegration was such that for the moment he hardly looked sane.

"Yes, his name is William."

"But you, of course, think me mad, Mr. Manders," Latton returned, suddenly calm, "but indeed I am not. Would you be so very kind as to introduce me to your uncle? I should be very much obliged if you would. It would be a real kindness and would cause him no trouble——"

"I hardly know—he is a very old man—if you will tell me why?" The Rector's voice was full of doubt; as he spoke the recumbent figure in the invalid chair moved and a bell rang sharply.

"There, that's his bell. My wife is away and his own servant has gone out. I must go to him."

"Mr. Manders," Latton said with convincing calm earnestness, "let me come with you."

Manders looked him full in the eyes. "You are rather an alarming man, you know," he said after a moment, "in your wild hunt for an aged William. However, as you are Scrutator, you will remember, I am sure," he added, as they went out on to the lawn, "that Uncle William is eighty-nine years old."

"I will remember." And a moment later the Rector introduced him.

"This is Mr. Latton, Uncle Bill," Manders said cheer-

fully. "My wife's uncle, Mr. Latton—Mr. William Branksome."

* * * *

For a moment everything seemed to swim round Latton, and in the passing darkness he heard the Rector exhorting him to be a dear good fellow and not faint. When he got his bearings again he apologised.

"The fact is," he said, "I have been sitting for some time. I had a bad night too——"

There amongst his green silk pillows, his mother's brother regarded him with mild distaste. "I think I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir," he said.

"I've just introduced Mr. Latton to you, Uncle Bill," put in the Rector mildly.

But old Branksome didn't seem to remember the name, nor to take the slightest interest in his visitor. "I want my Tokay, and my biscuit," he said fractiously. "Perfect nonsense, Tinker going out every Sunday. Lazy fellow Tinker."

His was not a noble old face. It was the face of a man who, so long as his strength lasted, had done everything bad and good that he wanted to do. It was also clearly evident that the things he had wished to do had been largely evil. He was exactly what Latton had expected him to be, but hideously disappointing too, that curmudgeon as Jenny Dakin's "William!" Latton was conscious of a distinct feeling of anger with the old man, who had no business to be what he was.

When Manders had gone into the house for the wine, the old gentleman, after a vindictive glance at Latton, asked him suddenly—

"What d'ye here?"

"To meet you, sir."

"Me!"

"Yes, you!"

"How did ye ever hear of me? I have been dead for years. Who are ye?"

"I have told you, my name is John Latton."

This conveyed nothing to him. "John Latton—John Catten—John Batten. What does it matter what your name is?" William's voice was shrill and querulous. "Why did ye want to see me?" he repeated.

Latton regarded him gravely. "Have you," he asked, "no friends, that you are so surprised? Might not an old friend of yours have asked me to look you up?"

"No! At my age one has no friends; and all my relations are dead, thank God!"

Then Manders came back with the Tokay, which the old man emptied at one draught. When he had set the glass down, he burst out:

"Now, then, Willie, stop grinning at me—I hate your teeth!—and go away. I want to talk to Mr. Hatten!"

Manders, with a warning glance at Latton, withdrew.

After a pause Branksome resumed: "Now then—what do ye want? Tell me, unless it is money. I never give money to any one!"

"I know you don't. I don't want your money," retorted Latton, angrily glaring at the ancient old curmudgeon, who was his great-uncle.

"Oh, ye don't want money—so far, so good. But what is it ye do want?"

There was a pause, during which Latton gravely watched the evil wasted face.

"I want to know," he said at length with deliberation, "what Jennie Dakin would say if she could see you now."

The effect of his speech terrified him. Old William Branksome's face slowly turned a dark bluish purple, and then as slowly the blood ebbed, leaving him as white as *paper*.

"What did ye say?" he said gasping. But before the other man could reply, he added with a kind of shrinking humility: "You said Jennie Dakin."

Latton bowed. "Yes!"

"But how did ye know?" Branksome's voice was low, his wrinkled lips quivered. "It must be twenty years since I've mentioned her name aloud——"

The curious phrase of his remark struck Latton: "mentioned her name aloud."

"Twenty years?"

"Yes, you see her sister Lucy was Agatha's mother!"

"And Agatha?"

The red, almost hairless ridges that were the old man's eyebrows moved painfully. "Don't ye see," he said in a fretful tone, "Agatha is Willie's wife!"

"Mr. Manders' wife! Oh, I see!" He vaguely remembered his mother mentioning a Lucy, but she had rarely spoken about her family.

The old man's hands stirred on his green rug, as if he were trying to make a persuasive gesture. "But who told you about—her?"

Latton wished he hadn't mentioned the matter. The old man's distress was painful to see. "Nobody told me, sir," he said in a more deferential voice than up to this he had used. "I assure you I had never heard her name uttered. I just happened to see the 'In Memoriam' in *The Times* yesterday."

The old man started. "The 'In Memoriam'—yes—but how? I only signed it William, because I always have done."

"Yes, but you see, there was only one Applecage Rectory!"

"Do you mean to say," shrieked Branksome, "that I was such a —— fool as to sign it from Applecage Rec-

tory?" His language was foul as well as blasphemous, and Latton's uncomfortable pity faded a little.

"You were," he assented drily.

"That," burst out his great-uncle in a terrifying rage, "is because I am so damnably old, because I've outlived my wits; and to think that after all these years I should have betrayed it."

"Does it matter very much, sir?"

"It does matter, after keeping my secret all these years. How they'll laugh—Rex Radford and Henry Senhouse and the rest——"

"The present Lord Radford's name is Oliver, sir," returned Latton, "and his father, with whom I used to play when I was a child, was Robert."

The old man was leaning back exhausted among his pillows, murmuring to himself. "Of course! of course! Rex is dead long ago and Henry Senhouse too; they are all dead but me, but," he added weakly, tears in his eyes, "I wish I hadn't been such an ass as to put the name of the Rectory in." After a pause he went on, "I'd my pride in it, you see. Radford wanted her, and asked her twice—and I always suspected Harry too, but they none of them dreamed that I could love a little country girl." There was vanity in his feeble voice. "She didn't know either till just the end. She lay," he continued, "under this very tree on a sofa, and two days before—the end she sent for me. I was in London, but I came at once. It was a beautiful day like this one. Lucy brought me up to her."

"Then they lived here?"

"Yes, old Dr. Dakin was Rector here. Well—Lucy was a good girl though her nose was always red—went in and left me alone. Jennie was looking very pretty; she had a blue shawl over her knee——"

Latton knew that the old man was talking more to himself than to him and sat quite still.

"When we were alone she said to me, 'William, I am going to die. Will you wish me good-bye?' I was ashamed to kiss her, but I did. And then I told her that for all my wild ways that had hurt so—poor gentle creature—I loved her. She smiled then—and I knelt by her and she stroked my hair. I'd never dreamed that she loved me—my sweet Jane—but she died. And I've never doubted that my way of living hastened her death. It was what in those days even doctors called a decline."

"And then, sir?" Latton's voice had a break in it.

"And then—oh, well, she said I'd soon forget her and marry some one else, and I said, 'Jenny, my peerless angel! I'll never forget you, and I'll never marry!'" The old man continued: "Yes—sixty-five years later, but I never forget Jenny. If you get the old files of *The Times* you will see that. Every anniversary of her death I have put in the notice—sometimes prose, sometimes poetry. I used to have a pretty turn for poetry, and now it's sixty-five years since she died—sixty-five years——"

His voice died away and there was a long pause. The shadows had crept half across the lawn by now, and Latton rose. "Mr. Branksome," he said gently, "I thank you for telling me this. It is a most beautiful story."

The old man pulled himself together. "Yes," he agreed, "it is not every man who remembers a woman for sixty-five years."

Latton wished to hurry away before the ugly expression came back to the old face, which for a few minutes had had such a curiously newly awakened look.

"Good-bye, sir." He held out his hand and Branksome took it.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gratten. Remember." And the

nobler look rested like a ray of late pale sunlight on his old face. "There is one thing no man can do, that is to really love more than one woman. A man can think he can, no more than that—but when he is old like me and looks back, he knows that out of all of them he really loves only one."

Latton, making up his mind to write his excuses to the Rector, closed the garden gate softly and hurried across the fields towards the station, wrapped in dreams.

HELPING HERSEY

I

MICHAEL BARNES had not been in London for over fifteen years, and his first sensation on going out into the grey, damp streets that November morning after his arrival was a rather childish one of loneliness.

The great town was so busy, so full, and nobody knew him, or wanted him. He felt insignificant and superfluous—most disagreeable things to feel, as most people know. He was stopping at Morley's and had gone out immediately after his breakfast and walked round to the steps of the National Gallery; there he paused for a moment trying to absorb the mental atmosphere of the place and to lose that of his distant western home. It was as though he were attempting, after years of speaking one tongue, to attune his ears to another.

These busy folk on foot, or in taxis and 'buses, were thinking, he knew, other thoughts than their brethren in St. Mark. The subtle difference in the expression of English people from that of Americans struck him strongly, for he had never been long enough in the old country to have his keenness of vision blurred.

There was less hurry, fewer nervous lines in the faces of the cityward hurrying men of the clerk class, but where, he wondered, was the boasted roast-beef physique the absence of which many travelled Englishmen had written of after visiting America?

Pale and stunted most of the men, and the few women were no more remarkable for the beauty of their com-

plexions than would have been their social counterparts in St. Mark.

This pleased Barnes, for he was a thorough American, although his shoulders were not padded and the toes of his boots were not knobby and turned in. He was a tall, rather heavily built man of something over forty, with a thin face, short curly grey hair, and beautiful blue eyes.

His face was not handsome, but it had an arresting quality of kind alertness, and to this he owed many glances from the passers-by as he stood there in the now clearing fog, a tall figure in well-cut blue serge.

He was a successful man, and looked it. Work had drawn lines on his face, effort compressed the corners of his mouth, but the tranquil joy of achievement looked out of his eyes. He had come to London partly on a matter of business that might have been accomplished by letter, had not he felt that the time had come for him to take a holiday, and as the man he wished to see had written that he was going out of town for the week-end, Barnes had that day and the next to himself.

What should he do with his time?

He would, of course, see the Tower, the Abbey, and St. Paul's. He also wished to have a look at the Law Courts, but as he stood there in Trafalgar Square that morning, a faint stirring in him of a spirit of adventure filled him with discontent. If only something would happen! He was not, somehow, in the mood for sight-seeing; he wanted—what was it he wanted?

Unselfconscious, as very concentrated men often are, the American stood there by the steps, trying to decide what it was that he did want.

Then, as two men passed him, the one talking vehemently to the other, he knew.

He had not spoken to a soul since landing the day be-

fore, at noon. He was lonely, and he wanted some one to talk with.

Barnes smiled at this simple solution to his problem. It was rather absurd: here he was in a city of God knows how many souls; and, so far as he was aware of, the only creature he knew there, man, woman, or child, was Leonard Hobart, the man of law, who was leaving before noon for the country!

Years ago Barnes had gone on lonely shooting trips in the west of America; he had camped quite alone many times and spent days wandering about in the woods. But—he had never before felt lonely. He was a practical man, little given to introspection, but this fact impressed him strongly. It was curious the forlorn sensation in the heart of London.

"Well," he exclaimed aloud, giving himself a shake, "this is absurd. I'll go—somewhere—anyhow."

Five minutes later he sat on top of a 'bus, going he had not the slightest idea where.

"Wherever the thing stops I'll get off," he decided, the mild spirit of adventure in him gratified with the decision.

The 'bus rumbled along, its occupants changing kaleidoscopically. Like many Americans, Barnes was inclined to see in the humbler classes of London, people created by Charles Dickens.

To-day he beheld, with a sense of fury, Mrs. Gamp, a large bundle on her lap, a bottle under her shawl. Surely there *was* a Mrs. 'Arris and Sairey was on her way to that fruitful lady?

Bradley Headstone sat next him for a time, pale and nervous, and poor Miss Flite, muttering to herself, lost her ticket and timidly accepted Barnes's, watching him with nearly black eyes as he bought another.

The sun came out, and at a street crossing, he beheld

poor Joe in the very act of being told to move on by a large copper.

If Charles Dickens knows how his wonderful imagination has peopled London, with creatures far more real than most of the flesh and blood men and women who inhabit it, his spirit surely rejoices.

Gradually Michael Barnes's mood changed, as the magic of the old city gained on him.

The 'bus was jolting up Piccadilly, the Park was beautiful even in November, and when they passed Apsley House, and he remembered it, something urged him to say to the man next him: "The old Duke's house, isn't it?"

The man turned. He was a pleasant-faced, rather handsome youth with a flower in his coat.

"Apsley House, yes. You're an American, aren't you?"

"Yes. Haven't been in England since—well, since *you* were a small boy."

The young man laughed, showing brilliantly white teeth. "That's not so very long ago," he returned, cheerfully.

Barnes, full of the untravelled American's illusions regarding the rude reserve of the Briton at Home, felt a sensation of grateful surprise.

"Not so very," he said, "but I was as old then as you look now. Hello, here comes Mr. Dombey."

A tall, thin, starched-looking man had sat down on the seat alongside.

"Mr. Who?" asked the Englishman.

"Mr. Dombey—Paul's father——"

"Oh yes, of course, of course." But it was quite obvious that he did not know who Paul and Paul's father were.

"I guess you don't read Dickens much over here," commented Barnes, good-naturedly.

"Oh—it's Dickens. No, I can't do with him, somehow. But I know whom you mean. Dombey and Son, of course. No, Dickens is a bit old-fashioned nowadays. Have you read *Joseph Vance*?"

"No. By whom?"

"I've forgotten the chap's name, but they say he's very like Dickens. Had enormous sales. A fine book that."

Barnes laughed. "You read him because he's like Dickens, but you don't read Dickens!"

By the time they reached Putney Bridge the two men were very friendly. Barnes liked the young man, who was not quite a gentleman, and the young man liked Barnes, who was what he considered a typical American. The young man informed Barnes that he was a reporter on a big morning paper, and that he was on his way to interview a chap who had invented a very powerful explosive.

"Where are you going?" he added.

"Nowhere. Or—anywhere. I have a business engagement on Monday, but until then I am just amusing myself. I think I'll go to a play to-night. What had I better see?"

Before they parted, Barnes to go back to town on another 'bus, they had arranged to dine together at a restaurant known to the Englishman, and apparently, judging from his air of mystery, *only* to him, near Leicester Square.

"My name is Alfred Cox," he said. "I'll be there at eight sharp. If they should send me off for a 'story' somewhere, I'll let you know. Morley's, you said?"

Barnes's mood had changed; he had lost his lonely feeling, and went back rejoicing.

He visited Charles Lamb's rooms in the Temple that

morning, lunched at the Cheshire Cheese, took a look at St. Olave's where Pepys went to Church, and drank tea (which he loathed) at the Carlton in lonely splendour, because he had been told by a woman on the steamer that it was amusing. Then, at eight o'clock, he met Cox at the restaurant, and for the first time in his life drank ale out of a tankard.

Cox was in high spirits and his best clothes. He still wore the flower in his coat.

Americans are laughed at for asking questions, and Barnes asked a good many. The inner workings of the great machine that every newspaper is, interested him, and about it he learned much. Cox was communicative, cheerful, and, in an inoffensive way, a little vulgar. This Barnes, himself a gentleman by birth and education, did not mind, as he liked the man.

On his side, Cox realised Barnes's superiority, and respected it as his American counterpart never would have done. He knew quite well that he himself was not a gentleman, and the knowledge was quite without bitterness—indeed, he was innocently proud of his guest's quiet air of distinction.

The dinner was simple, but good, and seemed to Barnes a traditional English dinner. They ate it in a little pen, which pleased him mightily in its likeness to those little pens drawn by Dickens. The waiter had mutton-chop whiskers, and served them admirably grilled mutton chops, the boiled potatoes of Great Britain, and, later, the usual bad coffee of that delightful country.

"I feel," the American remarked, "as if I were in a novel."

"Dickens, of course," returned his host, laughing.

"Yes—or Thackeray. This ale—bitters, you called it?—is delicious. Colonel Newcome would have thought it

low, perhaps, but dear old James Binnie would have liked it."

"H'm—yes. I say," went on the young man, hastily, "it is jolly to meet a *real* American. There are a lot of you in Fleet Street, but they are all anglicised—or think they are. Now you are the real, Simon Pure article, aren't you?"

"Yes. I have been too busy to travel; I have lived my life, but for a fortnight fifteen years ago, in my own land, among my own people. It keeps one narrow, of course, but——" he paused, reflectively—"keeps one deeper than the overflowing into cosmopolitanism allows many Americans to be," he added. "I mean deeper politically, of course."

"You mean you really *do* love your country?"

"I do. With all my heart. It is the only country for me."

Cox watched him for a minute.

"Yes—you are the only real dyed-in-the-wool Uncle Sam I've ever seen—I mean Uncle Jonathan——"

"Brother Jonathan," corrected Barnes, not smiling.

Then came the bad coffee, and, as he stirred his, Cox burst out: "I say, I *ought* to like Americans—I'm going to marry one."

"Are you?"

Barnes watched the waiter with grave delight as that worthy asked Cox if there was 'h'anythink else,' and then turned his attention to his host's announcement.

"Are you to be married soon?"

"As soon as I can count on £500 a year. In about six months I should say. I've been promised a rise, and I'm doing pretty well. Here's her picture."

Barnes held the little locket for a moment, without opening it. It offended something in him that a man

should show his sweetheart's picture to a perfect stranger, in a restaurant. But Cox, he told himself, was Cox.

He opened the locket. "By George!" he said.

Cox laughed aloud. "I thought she'd surprise you. Even better than that, too, in real life—her colouring is glorious."

"She is most beautiful," agreed Barnes, heartily, returning the trinket.

"*And the greatest darling in the world.*" Cox's good-looking face glowed with something that seemed to melt his slight vulgarity and show better things behind. "Mrs. Frewen must have been a beauty too," the young man went on, "but nothing compared to her daughter."

"Mrs.—*Who?*" Barnes's voice was suddenly sharp.

"Frewen. That's their name."

"Oh. Can you tell me her Christian name?"

"Can I? Of course I can. It's Hersey. A quaint name, isn't it? Suits her, somehow."

Barnes drew a sigh of relief. "A pretty name. I never heard it before. For a moment I thought it might be—some one I used to know—American, too, but her name was—different."

"I see."

Cox lit a cigar and offered one to his guest. Then he said, leaning back in his corner: "They may be the same people—there is some mystery about the mother—I don't know what, and I don't care. It happened years ago—out west somewhere. I believe Frewen was her second husband."

Barnes looked at his cigar. "No—the lady I was thinking of was named Violet."

"Exactly—well, so is hers—Hersey's mother, I mean to say. Oh, you thought the *daughter's* name was Violet!"

"Yes. I—I hope things are well with Mrs.—Frewen?"

There was a little vertical line between Barnes's eyes as he spoke. He looked what he was—ill at ease.

Cox shook his head.

"None too well. They live in a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and I fancy they are pretty hard up. I suppose they were swells in your day?"

"Yes—I suppose they were."

"I thought so. They are not now," the young man concluded, gaily, "as you can see—or she would not be engaged to *me*."

"Does Violet—Mrs. Frewen, approve of the engagement?" asked Barnes, unable to resist putting the question.

"Oh yes, she seems to like me well enough, though—you see, my father is a saddler in Derby."

He said it simply—what Barnes called to himself, "nicely."

Nevertheless, when he was on his way back to his hotel, Barnes was conscious of a feeling of sadness. Violet Barston's daughter should not have married the son of a Derby saddler.

II

Barnes had made no plan to see Cox again. The whole thing had been the outcome of one of the sudden impulses that as he grew older caused him some surprise in his contemplation of his own character. Why he, Michael Barnes, should have hobnobbed with a youthful reporter who had more than a streak of vulgarity in him, it was difficult to say.

He had been lonely, and Cox was attractive. These were the real reasons, but they seemed insufficient as he reflected on the matter.

And he had liked Cox for not urging a future meeting on him. There are, he mused, dozens of kinds of vul-

garity, and the buoyant reporter's kind was singularly inoffensive.

"There may be a gentleman inside him, somewhere," he concluded, as he switched off his light, "but as he is an Englishman he'll go to his grave without suspecting it."

During the next few days Barnes settled the business that had been one of his reasons for coming to London, and conscientiously "saw the sights," many of them for the first time. He spent a morning at the Tower, an afternoon in the Abbey, which, like so many Americans, he loved, and one sunny morning drove to Chelsea and "went over" the Carlyle House reverently, although Carlyle's style had always bored him to tears.

He saw a play at His Majesty's, in which he greatly admired Sir Herbert Tree; he fell in love (at a distance) with clever Miss Gertie Millar; and he sat through, with the stolidity of an American Indian, a "show" at a music-hall.

Then he felt that he had done his duty and his London, and was on his way to engage his passage home, when Fate overtook him.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and a layer of very thin sunlight lay on the street. Barnes was swinging along Pall Mall when he heard his name called in a man's voice.

"Mr. Barnes! Mr. Barnes!"

Turning, he saw a hansom drawing up at the kerb, and over the apron beamed the face of Mr. Alfred Cox. Beside him sat the prettiest girl Barnes had ever seen in his life.

She wore a large black hat, in her black furs nestled a bunch of violets, and she looked like Flora, like an angel, like—— Barnes bowed ceremoniously and gave up looking for further comparisons. It was useless.

"I've told her about you," Cox explained. "And she's delighted to meet you, aren't you, Hersey?"

"I am," said Hersey, smiling.

Barnes would have been, he felt, vaguely embarrassed by the meeting—for how much had the communicative Cox told her?—but for her overwhelming quality. This prevented clear thought on his part. He felt breathless.

"We're going to see the Russian Dancers," declared Cox. "I've got a box. Will you come?"

Barnes had read of the Dancers, but not seen them. He felt no wish to see them, but he felt a strong distaste for losing sight of Hersey Frewen.

So he hailed another hansom and rejoined the young couple at the doors of the Palace.

Cox was vastly proud of his box, and his naïve hospitality pleased Barnes. The boy *was* nice. But Pavlova and Mordkin had one blind observer that day. Barnes glanced at them occasionally, and the rest of the time watched Violet Barston's daughter. Violet had never been so beautiful as this, even in her first youth.

Presently the girl turned to him and began to talk in an undertone.

"Aren't they perfect?" she murmured.

"Who?"

"Why, the dancers!"

"Oh yes, of course."

She asked him questions about his doings in London. Had he seen dear Charles Wyndham's play? And did he loathe the fogs? *She* did, but she and her mother were too disgustingly poor to go away.

He answered her, rather at random, and presently Cox turned.

"I say, you two," he commanded, good-temperedly impatient, "*do* shut up."

Miss Frewen laughed. "All right. He's perfectly mad about these people," she explained to Barnes. "They *are* good, of course, but——"

Barnes watched the dancing for a moment, and then she leaned over and whispered: "What part of America do you come from? *We* are Americans, you know."

"St. Mark," he said briefly, uneasily.

But it meant only one thing to her. "Why, I was born there, and so was Mother. How quaint!"

Evidently Cox had not told her that he knew about her mother. Barnes was glad.

"Mother *will* be interested," the girl went on, still whispering. It gave him a curious feeling of intimacy with her, the way she leaned over to avoid disturbing the enraptured Cox, who had frankly and unashamedly turned his back to her and was gazing at the stage.

When the dancing was over and they had left the theatre, Cox hailed a taxi.

"I've got to tear down to the office, or my ears will be nailed to the door as a warning," he explained. "I'll come to-morrow night, dear. Perhaps you'll take her home," he added to Barnes.

The girl, who was already seated in the taxi, looked out and smiled invitingly.

"Oh yes, do," she said, "if you aren't busy."

The drive was very short, or seemed so to Barnes. When the taxi stopped before a shabby house in a shabby street near Russell Square, Miss Frewen asked him to come in.

"Mother will be delighted," she said. "We never see a soul from home, you know."

He hesitated. He did not know whether he wished to see Violet Barston, or whether Violet Barston would wish to see him. Besides, he was going home next week.

"Do come," urged the young girl, cordially.

But he did not go. Without attempting to analyse his reasons, he decided that he would go back to his hotel.

As the taxi turned, he watched Violet Barston's daughter, who was still standing where he had left her, by the door. The joy and life seemed to have departed from her; her head drooped, her mouth turned at the corners, the very feathers in her hat seemed afflicted by sudden depression.

Evidently the poor child was going to a sad home.

Barnes went to a play that evening, and after it supped in lonely splendour at the Savoy, of which he had heard and read much.

Many interesting people were there. The heroine of the latest theatrical divorce, an Indian Prince, a great tenor, Miss Phyllis Dare, an æsthetic peeress whose wan, bony face he had often seen in the papers—the place was crowded, the supper and wine excellent.

But Barnes was lonely, with a loneliness far greater than that of the desert. And always he seemed to see the exquisite face of Violet Barston's daughter.

He was glad he had not gone to see Mrs. Frewen. The girl evidently knew nothing of her mother's story, and the meeting could only have caused embarrassment. Yes, he had been wise not to go in.

And yet——

He went to bed vowing that he would sail by the first steamer.

"I am not going," he told himself severely, as he took off his boots, "to fall in love with Hersey Frewen." He had been in love once, years before, and that, he declared with much firmness, was enough for him.

The next day horror descended upon him at breakfast. He went for a walk and rushed back with a kind of terrified longing for shelter. Lunch was a nightmare. Something black, bleak, bitter, seemed to be closing in on

him like darkness. He longed to die, to be dead, to be at the bottom of the sea. He wished he had never been born. He had resentful thoughts of his father and mother for having given him life.

He could not eat, he could not rest. The sense of impending calamity was so overwhelming. As he rose to leave the dining-room his waiter, a portly man who looked something like the late President McKinley, observed with a respectfully sympathetic manner—

"It is pretty bad, sir, isn't it? Hi've noticed it takes Americans worse than us as is more used to it, sir."

"What do you mean?" asked Barnes, amazed.

"The London Sunday, sir. I 'ear many people remarking that it isn't cheerful-like——"

So that was it! Barnes, enlightened, went to his room, and there found to his surprise, a note from Violet Frewen.

"Dear Michael," she wrote. "I have just heard from Alfred Cox that the Mr. Barnes Hersey told me about yesterday, really is my old friend.

"I half thought he might be, but was not sure. I shall be alone this afternoon, as Alfred is taking Hersey to a concert. I shall be glad to see you if you care to come."

Poor Violet! And yet it had all been her fault, and on the whole, he remembered, he had always considered that she got off easily.

Later he wondered whether he would have gone if it had not been for his terror of the loneliness of that great institution, the London Sunday. Possibly not. However, it *was* Sunday, and, telling himself that it was hardly avoidable, and that, moreover, the dangerous Hersey was not to be there, he, like the young lady of Kent, *went*.

III

Mrs. Frewen was not in her sitting-room when the untidy maid showed him in, so, to his own satisfaction, Barnes had a few moments alone, in which, with the help of his surroundings, he could come to some sort of a theory about his hostess.

The psychology of even lodging-house rooms is a very curious and subtle thing, and to an observant man like Michael Barnes every object in the room, beyond and above the ugly shabby furniture, shed a slight light on Mrs. Frewen's character.

In a bookcase, evidently a relic of former prosperity, he observed a set of Ruskin, Tennyson's *Princess* (at which he smiled rather grimly), an incomplete set of an early edition of Dickens, Henley's poems, the works of Max Beerbohm, *Daily Help for Daily Needs*, a shabby Peerage, Maeterlinck's *Bee-Book*, Richard Carvel, and T. B. Aldrich's poems.

There was also a row of worn American school-books, probably those out of which Mrs. Frewen had drawn her own knowledge.

The collection of books surprised Barnes, for he remembered that at the trial her preference for shocking French novels had been dwelt upon. Perhaps Time had changed her taste.

There were flowers in the room; the small hearth was tidy, the blinds were drawn, and the electric light glowed softly in little yellow silk bags—evidently home-made. It was like her to think of the becomingness of things, and also to choose yellow. Pink would, of course, be too obvious to please her. Again Barnes smiled. There were pretty pillows on the hideously uncomfortable looking sofa, and a linen and lace tea-cloth on the tea-table, where a few bits of brilliantly polished silver twinkled in the

firelight. On the mahogany table between the windows stood several photographs in modest frames. The pictures were all strange to Barnes—all, that is, except one. The handsome, swaggering man in hussar's uniform was, of course, Gerald Frewen.

Barnes had seen him only once, and that was twenty years ago, but Frewen's was not a face to be forgotten, and he looked at it curiously. The man, he knew, was long since dead. What did her keeping his photograph signify? In one corner of it was written in faded ink the words: "Yours sincerely, Gerald Frewen, Jan. 1889." That was the year before the scandal—probably just after they had met. 'Poor Violet!

Barnes sighed and turned to the fire, and just then an inner door opened and she came in.

"It is good to see you," she said, simply; and suddenly all sorts of things that he had forgotten about her sprang into his memory.

Her voice—he remembered it at the trial, and it, at least, had not changed.

But, alas! he saw, with a thrill of something absurdly like horror, her eyes were carefully pencilled, and her cheeks glowed with a delicate artificial colour; while her lips were redder than God had intended any woman's lips to be.

Ah well! She had chosen her own road long ago, and this was its logical ending. How lovely she had been as a young woman! Of course, his mind went on rapidly, the poor thing still clung to the remains of her beauty.

While she was asking him questions about his own life, his mind worked rapidly, and when the first pause came, he was saying to himself, "At least, thank God, she doesn't dye her hair."

He was too inexperienced of European ways to realise

that the whiteness of her curly hair was probably a source of the liveliest satisfaction to the lady, or that its style of dressing was what a certain type of parisianised American calls the "belle Marquise" style.

"How curious it was, your running up against Alfred Cox," she said presently, when the silence had grown rather oppressive.

"Yes, wasn't it? I—I like him. He's a nice boy."

"He is—very nice. Handsome, too, don't you think, Michael?"

"Yes. Where did you meet him?"

"At the house of some friends—the man is a musical critic, and he knew Alfred in the way of business. Ralph Sturge—ever hear of him?"

She pronounced the name "Rafe" in the English way, and Barnes shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I'm very ignorant about such things."

"Oh, but Sturge, he writes for the *New York Sun* every week. It was *his* article on Richard Strauss that made such a fuss two years ago."

"Oh," cried Barnes, "you mean Ralph Sturge——" (giving the name the value of several l's). "Of course."

She smiled, and her smile was pretty still. "They call it Rafe here," she explained, "and I have lived so long here. One—one of my brothers-in-law was 'Ralph,' too."

After a moment she went on, while he was still wondering how Frewen's people had treated her, "So Mr. Sturge introduced Alfred to us. He thinks a good deal of Alfred. Says he is really talented."

She paused again, the firelight playing on her delicately tinted face. Then she said suddenly, "I suppose they told you they are engaged?"

Barnes nodded. "Oh yes, Cox told me the day I met him. He's very much in love."

"Yes, very much. It—it troubles me dreadfully, Michael."

He had expected her to be embarrassed when they met; the last time he had seen her had been in very strange, distressing circumstances, and he himself felt awkward and constrained. But she, to his surprise, seemed perfectly comfortable in her mind. Nothing could have been less constrained than her manner—indeed, he almost wondered whether she had not utterly forgotten where it was that they had last seen each other.

She seemed to have gone back in her memory to still earlier days—days before Gerald Frewen had come to St. Mark, and to have taken up their old friendly acquaintance (it had been nothing more) just where it had been broken off on Frewen's appearance.

"It troubles me dreadfully, Michael," she repeated, in a thoughtful voice. "Of course he is very nice, but you can see for yourself that he is not quite——"

He looked at her. If she wished to take him so matter-of-factly into her confidence, she must at least be explicit. He would not help her out.

"Not quite what?" he asked, bluntly.

Her answer, as blunt, came softened by the gentleness of her low voice. "A gentleman."

There was a long pause. Then she went on, as he gazed into the fire, "I don't quite know what to do, Michael."

Barnes frowned. It was like her, as he remembered her, to gently throw herself on him for help. People had always helped her, all her life, just because of that gentle way of hers.

"She is very beautiful," he returned, outwardly irrelevant. She followed his line of thought and answered it, disregarding his words.

"Of course it is perfectly natural that she should like

him—she sees so few men, and she is very young. He is attractive, you say, too. But—I don't want her to marry him, Michael."

"Why allow the engagement then?"

"She—— It is hard to explain. As I say, we know very few people, and they are none of them—well, the kind I used to know. That is natural. And he is the best of the lot."

"I know, I know. But I don't quite see how you could let them become engaged. Surely you could have waited?"

Mrs. Frewen looked up at him, her painted face very wistful. "There is nothing for us to wait for," she said, simply.

He was touched. "Are—are things that bad, Violet?" It was the first time he had used her Christian name since their interview began. She noticed it, he saw, and flushed under her paint.

"Yes, Michael, they are that bad. There is no use in going into details—some day, perhaps I will, but not, to-day—but I am quite done for in that way—socially, I mean."

"If Frewen had lived, I suppose——"

She shook her head. "Ah no! Poor Gerald! He did his best, but—he failed. In many ways it is a good thing he did not live."

"You have had a hard time, Violet."

"Yes. And yet——" her face broke into a sudden irresistible smile that wrinkled her eyes and yet, somehow, made her look younger. "And yet, I *have* so enjoyed life, Michael. And do still enjoy it, I mean. Things," she concluded, vaguely, still smiling, "are so interesting."

She was interesting, he realised. He had forgotten her charm and here it still was, having survived the ship-

wreck of her youth and her beauty, with no apparent diminution.

"Yes," he agreed, slowly, "things are interesting. But—about—Miss Frewen—— By the way, Violet, I suppose she is Jim's little Goldie? I never knew her real name."

"Yes, but she doesn't know that Gerald wasn't her father. It—was his wish."

"I see. And better for her, too. But it must have been difficult for you to manage—wasn't it?"

"At first it was. But—we lived in Paris until she was six, and then when he died I came back here, and no one seemed to—to place me. People forget very easily."

He nodded. "How old is Miss Frewen now?"

"She is twenty-five, but thinks she is twenty-three."

He marvelled at the simplicity with which she accepted her situation. The atmosphere of mystery in which she lived seemed, apparently, perfectly natural to her, perfectly easy to breathe in. Was it, he wondered, bravery, or merely temperament?

"So you have lived in London ever since she was six. *Really* six, or six according to her own belief?"

"Oh, really *eight*. Gerald lived six years after we were married. Yes, we have lived here. At first we had a house in Kensington, and then as time went on we moved to Bayswater and here. We got poorer and poorer," she continued blithely. "Luckily, I had a good many jewels."

"You mean that you sold them?"

"Yes."

"But you must have a fixed income?"

"Gerald did his best. He left me with £400 a year, but—well I lost most of it."

Barnes was a man of law. "Lost it?" he asked, sharply.

"Yes. I gambled. Speculated, you know. Thought I'd make money, but I lost it. I rather think the broker

did me. However——” She spread out her fingers expressively and made a funny little grimace.

“Why, in Heaven’s name, were you such a——” he broke off short.

“Because,” she returned, seriously, “I wanted to have money for Hersey.”

Her face changed, but he looked away impatiently. Of course that is just how she *would* look at that particular juncture. She had never made a mistake in *that* way in her life. But her look of exalted devotion did little good to the poor child of whom she spoke.

A strong sensation of pity for the girl stirred him. It was dreadful to think of that glorious young creature at the mercy of this idiot. Yes, Violet Barston had always been an idiot. And suddenly the paint on her face disgusted him. He rose, impatient.

“Well, I must go,” he declared, holding out his hand, “I am very glad to have seen you, and I hope——”

“Hush,” she said, disregarding his hand, “there they come, Hersey and—Alfred. Isn’t her laugh lovely?”

It *was* lovely. Barnes listened, and as he listened his indignation deepened against the woman before him. Hersey came in, still laughing, her brilliant face damp with rain, her fair, curly hair spangled with it.

“It’s pouring,” she announced, “and we *ran* as hard as ever we could, all the way from the Underground! Ugh, I’m out of breath. No tea, Mum?”

“Oh dear me, I’d quite forgotten the tea,” her mother answered with a gesture of despair. “I *am* sorry, Ducky. Ring, will you, Alfred? No, no, Michael, you mustn’t think of going. Tea will be ready in a moment.”

While she made it and Hersey and Cox chatted, Barnes watched the girl. He was positively oppressed with pity for her. What a position for the beautiful young thing

to be in. He thought resentfully of the foolishly lost £400 a year.

Cox spoke suddenly of the future, and Barnes awoke from his musings with a start.

"When we are merried," the young man said, his mouth just a little too full of cake, "when we are merried——"

Barnes winced, but when he saw that Mrs. Frewen was wincing too, he stiffened. She had no right to object to the man's accent, once she had accepted him as her son-in-law. And no doubt she had, with her maddening absence of foresight, jumped at the chance of having him for her son-in-law. Barnes sat silent, stirring his tea and watching the girl.

Why had not her fool of a mother had the patience to wait? A better man would certainly have come along—the girl was too beautiful to remain unobserved. Some man would surely have come. Suddenly Barnes set down his tea-cup with a little bang. *Would* come? Good God, hadn't *he* come?

"You must all dine with me one night this week, at a little French place I know," Cox was saying. He was in wonderful spirits. For a moment Barnes hated him.

Then suddenly Mrs. Frewen spoke—

"Hersey, dear, take Alfred into your den for a little while. Mr. Barnes and I have some business to discuss——"

Barnes rose when they were alone. Business! She would ask him to speculate for her, or some such nonsense, he supposed.

"I really must go now," he said.

"Wait a minute, Michael." She came close to him and laid one hand on his arm, in the way she had done twenty years ago. "Michael, I have a plan, a splendid plan!"

"Yes, yes. What is it?" He took up his hat and gloves and stick as he spoke, none too courteously.

"It's this. You like Hersey, don't you? I can see you do. And you'd like to help her?"

"Oh yes, I'd like to—to help Hersey," he answered, slowly, "but——"

"Wait a minute, let me finish. Michael," she added, with a little air of triumph, "you must marry her yourself!"

IV

Barnes made up his mind, as he left the house and walked westward in a driving rain, never to see any of them again. They should not exist for him, Mrs. Frewen, her daughter and young Cox.

An appalling woman, Mrs. Frewen, with her paint and her plan. Plan, indeed! Barnes almost laughed as he thought of it. The utter, cold-blooded lack of principle exposed by her voicing of her plan really horrified him. Had she *no* sense of honour, he asked himself—and poor young Cox in the next room!

"Yet what should I have expected?" he thought, "from a woman who did what she did?"

The ugliness of the old story struck him afresh. Of course she had retrograded, and gone down morally as well as socially. It was quite natural. But he wished he had not seen her again. However the episode was over now. He would go away, and Hersey would marry Cox, who at least was an honest young fellow, and Mrs. Frewen would go on muddling her affairs and other people's as long as she lived.

Barnes had his mind under good control, so when he had come to this conclusion he put the matter aside, ate his lonely dinner, and wrote letters till bedtime.

The next morning he engaged a passage in a steamer

sailing on Wednesday, and then, after going back to Morley's for a coat, went to the Tate Gallery to look at pictures.

It had turned very cold, with the chilly coldness so disagreeable to Americans. In his taxi Barnes turned up his collar and shivered. Then he lit a cigar for the sake of comfort. He was glad he was going home. Work after all was the best thing for him. His little holiday had been a disappointment to him. He had been bored most of the time and the rest of the time he had been upset. Yes, upset was certainly the word. He wished he had had the sense not to go and see Violet Frewen. He wished he had never set eyes on her daughter. It was annoying to pity any one as he pitied the girl.

Before he left town he must write a note to Mrs. Frewen and apologise for the rudeness with which he had met her offer of her daughter's hand. He could not quite recall what he had said, but he had been very angry, and he remembered the fright on her face as he spoke.

"Humbug!" he said, wrathfully, as he went up the steps of the Museum, "she wasn't really frightened at all, of course. Oh well, it's over now, thank Heaven."

But it was not over. The Fates had always befriended Mrs. Frewen, if only in that they had provided for her a series of emotional experiences that had prevented her from being dull, however much she might have suffered, and they had that morning intervened in her behalf. They had turned the day cold, so that Barnes had gone back to his hotel for a great coat.

They had suggested to him a visit to the Tate, a taxi to go in, and an inquiry of the hall porter as to the quickest route thither. Thus, when Mrs. Frewen called at Morley's half-an-hour after Barnes had left, the hall-porter obligingly informed her whither he had gone; and

a little later she came upon him as he stood with his hands in his pockets gloomily contemplating the Beata Beatrix.

"Hello, Michael!" she said.

He started, and in the first unguarded moment of his displeased surprise glared at her. Then he cleared his face, took off his hat, and they shook hands.

"I went to your hotel," she explained frankly, "and the man told me you were here. So I came too."

"Oh!"

"You really are a funny old thing," she went on, looking up at him.

He was not a funny old thing, and he disliked being told that he was one.

She wore a charmingly simple coat and skirt of grey homespun; and her small felt hat, with an audacious twist to its brim and a green quill in it, suited her very well. Behind her veil the paint was less apparent than it had been the day before. She looked very young and very pretty. Even Barnes, bored to death as he was by her sudden appearance, thought vaguely that she looked as if her hair were powdered.

"You want to see me?" he asked, coldly. He was the kindest of men, but the slightest suggestion of pursuit on the part of a woman, put, as he mentally expressed it, his back up. But she either did not see, or chose to disregard his manner.

"Come and sit down for a few minutes, Michael," she said, "I *must* talk to you."

They were by chance alone in the room, and also by chance they sat facing the Beata Beatrix. While he listened to what Mrs. Frewen had to say, Barnes's eyes were subconsciously studying the picture she had found him vainly trying to admire.

"You must be a little patient with me, Michael,"

she began, folding her hands on her lap. "I must go back—a little way."

"All right—I'll be patient."

"You remember, of course, all about me—and Jim, and Gerald."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well—of course I was wicked—very wicked, according to your way of thinking. According to mine I wasn't, but that doesn't matter. I was *really* only eighteen when Jim Barston married me, and—well, you knew him."

"Yes."

"He was," she pursued, thoughtfully, "not exactly a bad man, but—he was a horrible husband. He didn't believe in God or in anything else, and of course he soon taught me not to. Then he left me alone, amused himself anyway he chose, and if I even spoke to another man, he was furiously jealous and made the most awful scenes. Why, one night——"

Barnes stirred uneasily. "Look here, Violet," he said, turning his fine blue eyes from the picture to her face, "what's the use of telling me these things?"

"I must, Michael—to make you understand. Well, then, when I was twenty-three, Gerald came and I fell in love with him. He *was* attractive," she murmured, her lips curving in an indulgent smile, "and he *was* such a dear. Jim liked him too, at first because poor Jim was a snob and Gerald was an Honourable, and then for his own sake. So—we were careless. Then one night Jim got very drunk and threatened to shoot me if I ever saw Gerald again. That, of course, was perfect nonsense. I didn't believe it, and Gerald didn't—and neither did Jim! That was the week before the—the accident."

"I know," returned Barnes, dryly. Did he not know?

Had not every detail of the story come out in every paper in the United States?

"Well—then, as you remember, he pretended to go away, and came back, and finding poor Gerald with me, fired at him without a word of warning. Gerald, of course, tried to get the revolver away, and *one* of them—God alone knows which—shot poor Jim. It was dreadful," she added, "but it wasn't fair to call it murder."

"The jurors didn't," observed Barnes, still looking at the red-haired girl in the picture.

"No, but—well, you know it all. When they let him off we came to Europe at once, and were married at Tours. Just remember all these things, Michael. They—help to explain—things."

"What things?" he asked, a little roughly.

"Well—Hersey."

"I don't see that at all. Hersey, your daughter, was only three years old, and can't remember a thing about it. Besides, she needs no explaining."

"Well—*we*, then. You see, when people cut me and I was thrown entirely on Gerald for companionship, I—I changed. I got very—hard, and indifferent. All Gerald's people had refused to see him—not because he had shot Jim, but because he married *me*. And he—he changed, of course. We—we weren't very happy, Michael."

He was about to murmur some word of sympathy when she went on hurriedly, "so you see, poor Hersey grew up in a queer, anomalous position, and that——"

Barnes turned towards her, his face fierce. "You seem to be excusing the poor child," he cried, angrily. "That isn't fair, Violet. It—it is *not* fair."

She stood for a moment looking hard at him. Then her lip shook, the shaking turned to a curve of laughter, and she turned away. There was a long pause.

Barnes, now staring with blind eyes at the Beatrix, wondered vaguely what she was up to now. Whatever her next move might be, it was sure to be a graceful one.

"Michael," she had come back and stood with one hand on his arm, looking down. "Michael, you are right. I have always had an awful trick of defending myself—indirectly—at *any one's* expense. That is what you have just been thinking. Oh, I never was a fool, you know, and I see it quite plainly. Well—I admit it. You are right. Poor Hersey! I was trying to make you think she was being spoilt—so you'd want to marry her and—get her away from me. Well—are you listening, Michael?"

"Yes, I am listening," she looked up, and he watched her face intently as she went on.

"Well, I do want you to marry her, Michael. But I'll tell you the truth. She is *not* spoilt. She is the sweetest child in the world—and she does her best to—to love me. It is my fault, entirely, that she can't. And that is why she is marrying poor Alfred Cox. To get away from—me."

Her face was infinitely touching, even to him, as she spoke. Even being what he knew her to be, he could not help pitying her. But at the same time, her inevitable truth to type half amused him. She could not, he told himself, help playing up to her position.

"To get away from you," he murmured.

"Yes. It—it is a little hard on me, perhaps, and—that is what I wanted you to feel. I can't help it, Michael," she went on plaintively. "I am made that way. But now—I might as well tell you the truth: she—Hersey—knows too much about me."

Two Germans passed just then, and for a moment the air rang with explosive *prachtvolls* and *grossartigs*.

When silence had again fallen, Michael Barnes said

slowly, "Knows too much about you, Violet? What do you mean?"

"I mean—well—have you never heard about M. de Fresnoy, and—Larry Warrender?"

"No."

"Well—they were friends of mine."

Unconsciously he drew away from her. Her face was set, and she followed him, her hand on his arm. "She was old enough to remember them. And—she does."

"You ought," he said, stepping aside so suddenly that her hand fell from his sleeve in spite of herself, "to be ashamed of yourself."

"Oh—ashamed?" She gave a shrill laugh, "Ashamed? No, I am not. I am what every other woman is—the result of the treatment of some man, or men. But never mind *me*. What I want you to see is, that poor Hersey is marrying Alfred Cox because it is the only way in which she can—escape from me."

"Well—I see that. What of it?"

"I have told you. Oh, I am quite frank with you *now*—I want you to marry her. I can see that you like her—why, you are half in love with her already. Aren't you?"

Barnes did not answer. He was thinking.

"*Aren't* you?" she persisted, reminding him of some insect, refusing to be brushed away.

"No."

"Look here, Michael. Give me your word of honour that you couldn't fall in love with her, and I'll give up." Her voice was dull, suddenly.

"I—how can I give you my word of honour on such a point? How can I tell with whom I could fall in love?"

She interrupted him impatiently. "Oh, bosh! You *can't* give me your word. Then—why not let yourself

go and marry her? Think how—lovely she is. And she is young—you could make of her whatever you chose.”

“She has promised,” said Barnes, slowly, “to marry Cox. Perhaps she loves him.”

“No, she does not. She told me herself it was only to get away from me.”

In desperation he pulled out his watch and looked at it. “I—I must go,” he said, “I have an engagement.”

Her little laugh was pathetically mirthless. “Oh yes—I can guess what kind of an engagement you have. To eat a chop with—Michael Barnes!”

He led the way out without answering, hailed a taxi and helped her into it. Then he took off his hat, stood in the faint sunlight, looking, as Americans have a way of looking, as if he never meant to put it on again.

“Good-bye, Michael,” she said.

“Good-bye, Violet.”

v

That night, for the first time in his life, Michael Barnes did not go to sleep until day had come.

Hour after hour he lay thinking, now trying not to think—his pillow a pillow of thorns, his bed a loathly place of torment. His head was confused, his thoughts were unruly and indistinct. Of only one thing was he quite sure; that he hated Violet Barston—as he continued, mentally, to call her—with all his heart.

She had always been something of a fool; even when she was a most beautiful young girl, no one had ever credited her with much brain; but heretofore he had regarded her misfortunes as the outcome merely of silliness. Now he believed savagely that they were in some way a premature punishment for her incredible villainy towards him. Can women do things such as she had

done? To him she appeared the most pernicious of schemers, and he hated her.

His pity for Hersey, which took its turn with his hatred of her mother, was in a way even more potent to tear at his heart-strings. The child, the beautiful little girl, good and sweet as even her scheming mother had finally been forced to admit, seemed the victim of a monstrous conspiracy on the part of the world. The mother had sinned, the child must suffer.

Barnes was a conventionally religious man, he went to church every Sunday, and believed in God as simply as a child. But he had never so listened to the words of Moses as he did now in the dark night in London: "The sins of the fathers——"

Over and over again the phrase ran through his head. That that exquisite young thing should be tied to an old reprobate of a mother, with a painted face and an utter lack of principle!

It became, towards morning, very nearly unbearable. Quite as nearly unbearable too, was the thought of the girl's escape through marrying Alfred Cox. Cox's "niceness" that had so pleased him hitherto, became powerless to make matters better. It was, indeed, an impossible marriage—though, as he remembered Mrs. Frewen's vehement voicing of its impossibility, his mind instantly clutched once more at the "niceness."

Cox was young, honestly in love, doing well in his work, and a good fellow. Yes, emphatically a good fellow. And yet—Hersey——

With a groan Barnes switched on the light for the hundredth time, and found that it was nearly seven o'clock.

It was a great relief to rise, take his bath, shave, and dress. These everyday acts seemed to quiet his nerves, and when he had drunk his coffee and eaten what he

considered ham and eggs, but which went down in his bill as bacon and eggs, he was able to smoke his cigar and read the *Daily Mail* with a certain amount of interest.

After all, these people and their doings were nothing to him; they had no place in his life. He would go back to America by Saturday's steamer, and forget all about them. Heavens, what a fool he had been to lie awake all night thinking about—of all people on earth—Violet Barston!

By ten o'clock he was in Pall Mall, on his way for the second time to the shipping office. Just here it was, he remembered, that Cox and Hersey Frewen had overtaken him in their hansom that day. How lovely she had been with the violets in her dark furs!

However, this time he reached the shipping office in what seemed to him by an unconscious mental choice of words, "safety," and engaged a passage on Saturday's steamer. It is strange how a decided step towards some unpleasant duty seems to ease matters. The relief of really having written to one's dentist and made an appointment, for instance, how virtuous it makes one feel and how distant the actual keeping of that same appointment!

All night Barnes had been telling himself that nothing on earth could induce him ever again to see Mrs. Frewen or her daughter. And now that he was definitely leaving London he was uncomfortably conscious that there was in the whole world nothing for which he longed as he longed for one more sight of the girl who was to marry the nice Mr. Cox.

He, Barnes, had done what he felt to be right; now let Fate do her worst—or best—for him.

Feeling exquisitely passive, beautifully on the knees of the gods, he walked towards Regent Street. He had

no idea of going anywhere. He was just going—somewhere.

But the Fates were apparently elsewhere that morning, for nothing happened, and it was with a distinct feeling of having been what he had heard young Cox call “done in the eye,” that Barnes found it was one o’clock, and that he was hungry.

“I daresay that woman will have written to me,” he thought, as he went into Morley’s, “her kind always *does* write.”

But Mrs. Frewen had not written, and it is astonishing how little Barnes’s bad opinion of her was altered by that circumstance.

He had a beefsteak for his lunch, and fried potatoes, but drew but little joy from these succulent edibles. Thoroughly disgusted, he took a taxi after lunch and drove to Richmond Park. He had tea at the Star and Garter, and tried to visualise Lord Kew’s famous party thus. But alas! Thackeray’s people had lost their power, for once, and he was constrained to listen to the conversation of an American family bent on doing London in four days, and whose racked nerves relieved themselves in furious quarrelling with each other.

For the first time Barnes heard the American Voice with the Ears of Understanding. Violet Barston and her daughter, if they had ever possessed the sharp tones of the west, had lost them, and poor Barnes listened to the voices of his countrywomen and wondered why they were so shrill, and why he was not hearing the soft, pretty ones of the ladies he was never again to see.

He dined at Simpson’s in lonely splendour, and going to bed at half-past ten slept like a tired hound until eight the next morning.

One day was gone, thank God.

He was lingering over his breakfast, when the old waiter approached him mysteriously.

"There's a lady to see you, sir," he began, in a kind of hoarse undertone; "a *young* lady."

"A young lady?"

"Yes, sir. She wishes to see you—something particular, I gathered, sir."

Barnes rose. "Ask her to go into the drawing-room, will you? I'll come at once."

He stood by the window for a moment, looking out into the greyish-yellow morning, and then, with set lips, followed the waiter.

Hersey Frewen stood by the fire, looking down at it through a thick veil. She wore her furs, but no violets.

"How do you do?" she began hurriedly. "I hope you don't mind my coming—I *had* to speak to some one, and you seem—like a friend, somehow."

"I *am* a friend," returned Barnes, a trifle stiffly, glancing round the room. It was empty, save for an old lady in a white cap, whom Barnes knew to be stone-deaf. "I hope nothing has happened," he added, as they sat down and she raised her veil.

"No. That is, yes. I mean to say, it's *going* to. Oh, Mr. Barnes, there's going to be such a row!" She was excited and flustered, her beautiful eyes glowed, and her mouth quivered as she spoke.

"A row? But what about?"

"About me. I am—going on the stage!"

Barnes started, honestly horrified. "Oh, but you can't do that. You can't possibly, you know. It—it wouldn't do at all."

"There—that's just what they'll say—Mother and Alfred, I mean. I thought you would be more—more sympathetic." Her voice broke, and she put a corner of her

handkerchief into her mouth, as if to stifle a sob; a childish gesture that seemed to him infinitely touching.

"I am sympathetic," he said, gently, "indeed I am—Miss Frewen. But I really don't see how you can go on the stage."

She looked at him seriously, something like reverence in her great eyes.

"Don't you? *Really*, I mean, when you think? Lots of girls do; *nice* girls, I mean."

"I know. But it's an awful life, and you are too—too—well, I don't quite know how to put it, but you *are*," he said lamely.

She turned and bent over the fire.

"Besides," he resumed, snatching frantically at his ebbing dignity, "your mother would hate it."

"I know. Oh, Mr. Barnes, I am very fond of mother, indeed I am, but—we are very unlike—I suppose I'm like my poor, darling father"—Barnes winced—"and—don't think me horrid, but—I can't stay there any longer. I must get away; I must *really*." She clasped her hands in her lap and again looked at him.

There was a short pause, during which the old lady, whose eyes were excellent, though her ears were not quite what they should have been, watched them closely. Then Barnes said, with an effort that made his face appear to the observer rather fine—

"But—Mr. Cox? When are you to be married?"

Hersey hesitated. "He—he wouldn't like it, of course, but—well, I might just as well tell you the *whole* truth. I—I am not going to marry him—ever."

The fire at which Barnes was looking seemed suddenly to go out, then to leap to the ceiling.

"Not marry him ever," he repeated, stupidly.

"No. Listen, Mr. Barnes. I—I know you think it horrible of me, but—I don't—care for him. I never did.

I only said I would marry him in order to get away from mother. There, now it's out."

Barnes did not speak.

"I love mother," she continued, wistfully, "but *we are* so unlike—I simply can't go on living with her. And I *hate* Bloomsbury, and I hate being poor, and I want to see people, and have a good time. I—I even want *clothes*! Now you will loathe me, but I can't help it."

Tears stood in her eyes, but did not fall as she gazed at him with a curious expression of mingled shrinking and bravado.

"I understand," he said slowly. "I understand perfectly. But—Cox is very—nice. And—excuse me for speaking plainly—he loves you and would take good care of you."

She shook her head impatiently, and the accumulated tears suddenly rolled down her cheeks. "He *shan't* take care of me. I don't love him, and I think it is—vile to marry a man one doesn't love. So there you are. I wanted to ask you to help me to persuade mother about the stage, or at least to help me through the worst of the row. She likes you—and then you knew my father. I thought," she went on simply, "that you might help me for my father's sake."

Barnes rose and walked to the window. The fog was closing in now, and it was very dark. Some one behind him, presumably the old lady with the bad ears and the good eyes, switched on the light. With it, Barnes's heart rose with a bang that nearly took away his breath. He went straight back to the fire and stood in front of the girl, thus hiding her from the old lady, whose cap-strings quivered with thwarted curiosity.

"Hersey," he said in a low voice, "if you really can't marry Cox—will you marry me?"

It was done, and it seemed years before she answered.

There was a green wing in her little black hat, and as she sat with bowed head, the green wing held Barnes's gaze with a sort of fascination. There were eleven little black spots on it, and two larger spots of a bright orange. And time went on.

The old lady at this juncture left the room, closing the door carefully. Barnes wondered why she had gone. Was it that she had an engagement or was she just kind? "Nine, ten, eleven little black spots on the wing——"

Then Hersey spoke.

"I—I am going to cry," she faltered. Then she cried, beautifully and inoffensively cried, without reddening her nose or mottling her complexion, without any ugly sounds.

"Don't," Barnes faltered, sitting down by her; "you mustn't. Please don't. I—I am sorry I said it. Forget all about it. I was a fool."

She looked up. "It isn't that," she said, nearly in a whisper; "it's—it's only that I am so—glad!"

VI

When Barnes was again alone he went for a walk. Hersey had gone home to write to Cox, and Barnes had no doubt but that the young man would come to see him that evening.

The interview promised to be a painful one, but Barnes was too convinced of the fairness of his act, as well as too strangely happy, to dread it overmuch.

And when Cox came, as he had expected, immediately after dinner, Barnes was able to use the words he had prepared, in a way not very usual in this world of unexpected upsets.

"I am glad to see you, Cox," he said; "you have a right to an explanation, and you shall have it."

Cox, who looked ill and unhappy, nodded. "Oh, I'm sure you've not done anything unfair," he said; "you wouldn't. But—her note was very short, and I—can't see her just yet. Will you—just tell me, please?"

To secure privacy the two men went out into the night and walked round the Square, as the exigencies of our beloved tongue force us to say.

"It's this way, Cox," Barnes began abruptly. "She came to me this morning and told me she was going on the stage—wanted me to help persuade her mother. I naturally asked her what you would have to say, and then she told me that—that——"

"I know," interrupted Cox, with a fine primitive gloom, "that she doesn't love me. I have known that all along. I am not *quite* a fool. But I thought—I thought perhaps she would get to. They sometimes do, women, I mean, if—if a man is good to them, to her. Oh, damn! I can't mind my grammar now. You know what I mean."

"Yes. Well, I thought so too, Cox. And I asked her, and—it was only when I saw that she would in no case marry you—that the alternative was her going on the stage—that I asked her to marry me."

"I see. Well, I'd rather have her marry you than go on the stage. No place for a girl like her. Oh, *I* know," he added, with a peculiar relish in his iniquitous knowledge. "Only—it's a bit hard, just at first."

Barnes thought him, at that moment, "nicer" than he had ever before thought him. It was, indeed, the American's only word for the quality Cox was showing.

"Look here, Cox—do you believe me when I say that if she had not come I should never have seen her again? I—only half realised my own feelings, but at the back of my mind I must have known, and I had the decency to get my passage for Saturday."

Cox stood still under an electric light, his worn face sweetened by an unexpected smile. "You are a good sort, Barnes," he exclaimed, holding out his hand; "*a real good sort.*"

Before they parted Cox had promised to buck up and join the party at dinner in a day or two, so as not to spoil poor little Hersey's happiness. Barnes, of course, had changed his ticket—in fact, he meant, when he *did* go, to enrich the Cunard people to the extent of the price of *two* passages.

Barnes went to bed enjoying to the full the Paradise of the middle-aged lover. He had even forgotten Violet Barston, her criminal attempt to secure her daughter's, and incidentally his own, happiness.

"Poor thing," he thought, as he dropped off to sleep; "it must be bitter for a mother to know that she is unworthy of her child's love."

* * * * *

As he waited at the door of Mrs. Frewen's boarding-house for the red-nosed slavey to open it, it was a comfort to Barnes to reflect on Mrs. Frewen's well-known adaptability. With any other woman under the sun he would have had to undergo an awkward quarter of an hour. Any other woman would have been driven by the necessity of "talking it over," but Mrs. Frewen, he knew, would smooth all difficulties away, with an explanationless word or two, and a delightful smile. In this he was right. When he entered the sitting-room, she was standing at a little newspaper-covered table, engaged in putting into vases the flowers he had an hour before sent to his beloved.

"Ah, Michael," she said, smiling just as she would, of course, smile (she had smiled in exactly the same way at the Gentlemen of the Jury twenty years ago). "How are you? Hersey will be back in a few minutes. Ex-

cuse my not shaking hands with you; I am dripping wet. Nasty day, isn't it?"

"Is it?" asked Barnes, vaguely.

She laughed with sheer amusement this time. "It is, to all but lovers. Well, I am glad, dear Michael; and no more need be said."

She was charming and easy-mannered, and he was grateful to her for not discussing things; but even in his glowing happiness he was conscious—such is the nature of man—of her irrepressible buoyancy. Could *nothing* embarrass her? he wondered.

As she talked on about indifferent things he continued to wonder. Had she forgotten her admissions to him of two days since? Did she not realise that he must be thinking of what she had said about Hersey—that the child knew too much about her for life with her to be any longer possible?

And did she not know that Hersey, poor little thing, must naturally have told him her real reason for wishing to escape home life by going on the stage?

And yet there she was, arranging her flowers, very pretty in the half-light with her delicately tinted cheeks, and her nearly white hair, chatting as easily and pleasantly as if he knew nothing whatever about her! All men feel rather wise and subtle when they admit that they know nothing whatever about women. Barnes was no exception to the rule.

As he watched his future mother-in-law at her graceful task, he sighed vaguely, and told himself that he "gave it up."

Then Hersey came in like the Spring of the poets, and Barnes forgot all about her mother. He took the two ladies to Scott's for luncheon, and gave them oysters and Chablis and other good things; and Hersey insisted on seeing the bill, and was agreeably horrified by it.

"Mother and I have often lived for a week on no more than this one meal has cost, haven't we, Mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Frewen nodded gently. "Yes, dear," she said.

Barnes, the simplest living of men, was appalled. That women were careless about their food he knew, but that two could live for a week on fifteen dollars, was news to him.

Hersey should never do it again, he told himself with a thrill of authority. Ah, what good care he would take of her! His blue eyes were very pleasant to see as he watched the girl, and Mrs. Frewen watched him with a curious expression on her face.

After lunch she sent him home with Hersey. They were to walk, she said; the exercise would do them both good, and besides, she had things to do.

The sun had come out. Hersey said the day was fine, at which Barnes laughed, not being acquainted with the euphemisms due to the British climate. To him the weather was just *not* abominable, and that to her it was fine amused him. It also seemed to express, not only the humility in the matter of weather, innate in Londoners, but also a quite personal beauty of character on the girl's part.

They went to a jeweller's in Bond Street, and chose her ring.

"I ought, I suppose, to come to you with it in my pocket," he said, "but tastes are so different, and I don't yet know yours."

He selected, without asking their various prices, half a dozen beautiful rings from the velvet cases set before them, and then asked the girl to take her choice. There were among the rings two solitaire diamonds, a ruby, an emerald, a sapphire, and a pearl. Without an instant's hesitation Hersey took the ruby.

"If it isn't any—any more expensive," she said shyly, "I'll have this. I love rubies more than any other stone."

"Good—you shall have it. We must go to my bank now; I haven't the money with me."

On their way through the crowded streets, she said suddenly, "You are very good to me, Mr. Barnes."

He laughed, and she went on quickly, "I mean to say Michael. It is such a pretty name."

And to him it was suddenly beautiful. While he cashed a cheque she wandered away from him, and presently he heard her laugh, and turned.

She was talking to a youth with a white carnation in his coat who had evidently just come in.

"It's ages, simply ages, since I saw you," the youth was saying, dropping, in his delight, his glass from his young eye. "I say, it really is most awfully jolly!"

"You look fit," was her answer.

"I am, thanks; jolly fit. As to you—oh, well, words simply fail me! I say, Miss Frewen, are you stoppin' in Town?"

Hersey made a face. "'Stoppin','" she answered, imitating him; "livin'—livin' in Bloomsbury. Rotten—what?"

Barnes listened, bewildered. The jargon was to his ears so extraordinary and so extraordinarily ugly. "Rotten" he considered a low word.

On their way back to Bond Street, Hersey explained that her friend was Sir Billy Humphreys. "His father was a great surgeon, or something, and they gave him a Baronetcy for cutting out something or other from some one of the R. F."

"R. F.?"

"Royal Family. Then the old man died, and Billy got the Baronetcy and the beans. We knew him two years ago in Bordighera, after I had influenza. A nice

boy," she said. "Oh, Michael! I am so glad you are really grown-up! I couldn't have borne marrying a boy."

He laughed. "Oh yes, I'm grown up, all right," he answered, as they reached the jeweller's. "I—I felt an old man the day before yesterday, and now you have made me a—well, years younger."

The ring was ready; and hurrying back to Bloomsbury, Barnes put it on her pretty, slim finger.

"I will do my best to make you happy," he declared a little solemnly; then he added, "dear."

They sat down by the fire, and she told him how happy she was. She said not a word about her mother, but Barnes felt that a not inconsiderable part of her happiness lay in the fact that by marrying him she would put the ocean between herself and her objectionable parent. Her loyalty pleased him.

"I should have loathed the stage," she said later. "Managers are such pigs—but—I simply could not marry poor Alfred. And he really is rather a dear. I had conscience-ache all the time, ever since—ever since—the last few days."

Barnes took her hand in his. "Ever since what, dearest?" he asked, a little shyly. "You can't possibly mean that——"

She leaned her head against his arm, so that he could not see her face. "I *do* mean it, though," she said. "An Englishman would have guessed it long ago. Are all Americans as modest as you?"

Even in his bliss Barnes smiled. "I guess we aren't any more modest than other men," he answered. "But, Hersey, how on earth could you care for—*me*?"

The real humility in his voice touched her. She kissed his hand, and then rested her cheek against it.

"You see, Michael dear, I am not very old—I am only twenty-three, and—we don't know many people. I don't

quite know why, but people don't seem to like us long. Just at first they do, and then somehow—ah, well, people are all busy with their own affairs—so, I have been rather lonely. Then poor Alfred came along, and—he is a dear, isn't he?"

"A very nice fellow indeed," agreed Barnes, absently. He was not thinking of poor Alfred.

"And—and as I told you, I thought I would like to—to leave mother, and Alfred *was* so jolly, and—I had never seen any one I liked better. Things weren't wildly cheery, but they were better than before I was engaged. You see, mother let me go to matinées with him, and to concerts, and sometimes we'd all go to a play together, and supper. It is fun, you know. And he gave me flowers—I really did believe I could get on all right with him, till you came."

Barnes raised his eyes and saw himself unexpectedly in a mirror that stood on a table near him. He saw himself with wonder. What was there in that ugly, bony face to attract a beautiful young creature like Hersey? He honestly wondered for a moment, and then he "gave it up" and turned again to her.

"And when I came?"

"Then—well, I suppose I just fell in love with you!"

He was about to try to answer the divine remark when Mrs. Frewen came in. She switched on the light and stood for a second watching them. Then her eyes suddenly filled with tears and she came impulsively towards them.

"Oh—oh, you dears!" she said, a little break in her voice. "It makes me so happy——"

Hersey drew back a little, and Michael felt something very like disgust. Of course, she could not do without her little scene. He wondered if she were about to call them her children and bless them. But she did

not. After a little pause, in which she watched them too closely, he knew, not to know what they were thinking, she went, without a word, into the next room.

VII

So many things of vital importance to Barnes having happened during those few days, it will be understood by the experienced reader that the next fortnight raced by in such joyous uneventfulness that, on looking back on it, it was difficult to distinguish one day from the other.

The Frewens and Barnes went to several plays, they dined and supped at various restaurants, at which the beauty of the two women attracted considerable attention. Hersey took her lover to Hampton Court and to the Temple Church, and—to Selfridge's, where he bought her several small gifts, and where she drank—or ate—a strawberry ice cream soda with a childish gusto that delighted him.

Some people were invited to tea at the boarding-house to meet him, only one of whom impressed him in the least.

"You won't like Lady Gussie," Hersey told him beforehand; "she's a cat as well as a frump, but for some reason or other mother is fond of her. She seems to like mother, too," she added, naïvely betraying her surprise at the circumstance.

But Barnes did like Lady Gussie, a hard-featured old woman in an amazing brown wig that covered her forehead with small tight curls. She possessed, moreover, the interesting qualities of having the largest feet he had ever seen on a woman, and of wearing a single glass.

"So," she said abruptly, as they shook hands, "you are going to marry the Sleeping Beauty."

"I am going to marry Miss Frewen; yes," he returned a little stiffly.

The old lady studied him openly for a few seconds, her keen gaze sweeping from his head to his feet and back again.

"H'm! Well, I have never seen a prettier girl," was her remark, on arriving at the end of her ocular research.

"Nor I."

"Lady Gussie has known Hersey ever since she was—a very little child," explained Mrs. Frewen, pouring the tea.

"Detestable she was, too—all American children are detestable." Lady Gussie's manner admitted no contradiction, and Barnes laughed.

"Oh, it's quite true, although you don't think so! We bring up our children differently."

"How many children have you, Lady Gussie?" asked Hersey, making an absurd face at Barnes behind the old lady's back.

"Do you see? *That's* American, thoroughly American. No manners at all. None. Violet, my dear, my tea is like lye; give me some more milk, please."

But in spite of these inauspicious beginnings, Barnes and Lady Gussie became very good friends. She invited him to dine at her old house in Kensington Square, and here for the first time he saw something of English social life.

Lady Gussie was an old frump most assuredly, but she was a well-born old frump, and her friends were worth meeting.

The only person except the Frewens at the dinner whom Barnes had ever seen before, was the youth of the eyeglass with whom Hersey had talked at the bank, Sir William Humphreys.

"He's a kind of distant cousin of mine," the old lady

told Barnes, who sat on her left. "His father cut up and sewed together again more Royalties than any man who ever lived. Billy will never do anything— Too rich and too spoilt."

"Oh! I thought only Americans spoilt their children," drawled Barnes, with an exaggeration of his native accent that he assumed on such occasions.

Lady Gussie laughed delightedly. "You are *too* bad," she declared, "but I like you just the same. Far too good for that minx, if you ask *me*—but there, of course you don't!"

"So Hersey is a minx? Well, then, I like minxes."

"So do I. To look at. That's a rather smart frock she has on. I suppose you gave it to her?"

Barnes blushed scarlet. It was to his mind so monstrously delicate a matter, and he had engineered it so cautiously—and now to have the old woman mention it so casually!

He did not answer her at all, but ate his game in silence. She watched him for a moment, and then said with a gentleness that surprised him: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Barnes—but you see I know them very well. I did not mean to be—objectionable." Then she turned to the littel wizened General on her right, and proceeded to demolish the War Office and all its works with astonishing vigour and venom.

Hersey sat opposite Barnes, and he watched her as she chatted with her two neighbours, young Humphreys and a middle-aged soldier who had brought only one arm back from South Africa.

She was blooming like a rose, Barnes thought, no more startlingly original in his smiles than other lovers; her happiness became her; how lovely she was in the frock he, with her mother's connivance, had been able to give her, without her own knowledge. His ring glit-

tered on her finger, and from time to time she shot a quick glance at it. She used her left hand much more than she had done before it was decorated with a ruby. Whenever she met Barnes's eyes she smiled, and she was at her loveliest when she smiled.

He was very happy.

Suddenly, as his gaze absently travelled down the table, he saw Mrs. Frewen looking at him, and he started. Her expression was a very strange one; it seemed for a moment as if it were one of regret and pity; then, as she saw him, it changed and she gave him a friendly nod.

Barnes flushed again. Was he looking too idiotically blissful for a man of his age? he wondered. But even if he were, what right had she to pity him? He was proud of being capable of feeling like a boy again. As usual, she amazed him, and he avoided looking her way during the rest of the dinner.

After it, there was an example of that strange British institution, "a little music after dinner."

Two ladies sang, and the one-armed soldier; then Lady Gussie played something of Schumann's. Nobody listened much to any of the artists, but they were all warmly thanked—on the conclusion of their efforts.

It all interested the American immensely, particularly the remark with which the first vocalist prefaced her performance: "Oh, well, I can't really sing, you know, only just a little, enough to amuse people after dinner." Barnes had read of drawing-room music. In America it does not exist in the British sense. However, like all long-established institutions, it has its merits, and brings with it a certain friendly feeling, and it is, moreover, a well-known aid to conversation.

It was altogether a pleasant evening. At its end Barnes, after promising Lady Gussie to come to tea "one

day," which he found an attractive variant from "some day," followed Mrs. and Miss Frewen down the stairs.

"Do come and see us, Sir Billy," Hersey was saying to Humphreys.

"Thanks so much; I will with pleasure."

"Ah yes, that's what you said that day in the Bank. But do come really." She smiled up at him as she spoke.

"Er—yes, of course I will, with the greatest pleasure. Er—good-night."

The young man hurried away, with a nervous farewell smile; and as no taxi was to be had, and the ladies were returning home in a hansom, Barnes bade them good-night and followed him.

At the corner he overtook him, and as the young man was a strange type to the elder, Barnes suggested that they should walk on together.

"With pleasure. I always walk home after dinner. A fad of my governor's. Thought it good for one's tum."

"'Tum'?"

"Little Mary—inside," explained Humphreys, with a quick side-glance at the Yankee, as he mentally termed the westerner.

"Oh yes, I see. Sound sense, I should say. It's a beautiful night, too—for London, that is."

"I suppose London seems to you Americans a pretty putrid climate—what?"

"Not a very good climate, I should say." Barnes loathed the word "putrid."

"Well, it's about as rotten as they make 'em—still, London is London, after all! Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks, I'll light a cigar."

After a long pause, Billy Humphreys said cautiously, "A real good-looker, Miss Frewen, ain't she?"

"Yes, she is very pretty. Do you live far from here?"

"Cavendish Square. 'Very pretty' doesn't begin to express it. She's—a wonder—a real wonder, the little wretch!"

"Why a 'little wretch'?" Barnes was amused. Was he to be treated to a love confidence?

"Oh, well—she turns my silly head, you see. I jolly near made an ass of myself two years ago in Italy about her. Just got away by the skin of my teeth."

Barnes puffed placidly. The confession was coming!

"Nearly fell in love with her, did you?"

"Nearly? My dear chap, I *did* fall—absolutely, with the loudest bang you ever heard in your life! It was awful, I tell you."

Barnes laughed. "I see. Oh, well, cheer up. You'll find some one you'll like quite as well, and—if she *had* married you, you might not have got on. You are too young for her, for one thing."

Young Humphreys settled his glass more firmly into his eye, and standing still, looked fixedly at his companion.

"I'm blowed if I don't think *you* think that she refused me!"

"Well—didn't she?"

The street echoed with Humphreys' loud laughter. "My dear man, *je pense que non!* She jolly well didn't get the chance. That's just where the trouble was. I was awfully far gone, but I was bound I shouldn't be bagged, and bagged I wasn't. She's a clever little devil, though, and it took some doing, I can tell you!"

Barnes threw away his cigar. "You mean me to believe that Mrs. Frewen tried to—to capture you for her daughter? If you were a little older I should kick you well for that speech."

As he spoke, he was conscious that at the back of his brain he believed the young man, cad though he

was; but he could not hear a woman lightly spoken of. Humphrey's face changed and became very nasty.

"Oh, you'd kick me, would you? Well, my youth is a good asset for—you, isn't it? And as you are so safe I will tell you that I didn't mean the mother at all. I mean the girl herself. You heard her urging me to call, didn't you? And I said I would. Well, I won't. I am afraid! She'd marry me in a week if I did. And I'd rather be shot than—— Oh, good-night," he called after Barnes, who had hailed a taxi. "Too bad I'm not a little older, isn't it?"

VIII

"The gentleman wants to know will the ladies see him?" The grinning maid held out the salver on which lay a card, and Mrs. Frewen rose.

"Oh," she said, "it's Sir William Humphreys."

Hersey, who had a cold and was huddled over the fire, patted her curly hair hastily. "Good! Ask the gentleman to come up, Gwendolyn."

"Wait a moment, dear. I should have told you at once—the other night after leaving Lady Gussie's—well, he is not a nice man, Humphreys. He—he said things that disgusted me. I should have warned you, only I hoped he would not turn up again. He is—not at all nice."

"Sir Billy?" Hersey opened her eyes wide. "Oh, I like him so much. A very decent infant, we thought him."

"But he isn't very decent, darling. Please say you are not at home," urged Barnes.

"Oh, Michael! Surely you don't want me to tell lies? I thought——"

"It isn't a lie, dear," protested her mother, gently, "and if Michael dislikes him——"

"Nonsense. Ask the gentleman to come up, Gwendolyn," she repeated to the servant, adding to Barnes, as the door closed, "he'll have heard our voices, and knows quite well that we are at home. We needn't see him again—if your reasons are *really* good, *old dear!*"

"They are good, or I should not have spoken." Barnes instinctively looked for help to the girl's mother, but Mrs. Frewen was sewing, and did not look up. The mental atmosphere had been electric all the afternoon. Barnes was sure that there had been a quarrel shortly before his arrival. Hersey's eyes were redder than a simple cold should have made them, and her manner to her mother was one of irrepressible reproach.

Mrs. Frewen, on the other hand, was plainly put out; there was a pucker between her eyebrows, and she had been very silent ever since Barnes's arrival.

Young Humphreys, when he had greeted the ladies, turned to Barnes and recognised him with a start.

"Ah—glad to see you again," he said, obviously lying horribly. "I didn't know you knew Mrs. and Miss Frewen——"

"So I gathered," returned Barnes dryly. "As it happens, I have known them both all their lives."

"O Lord!" Then Humphreys laughed. "If I had known you were here I should not have inflicted my loathsome presence on you. As I did not know, shall we call it a truce?"

Hersey watched them with a half-smile. Mrs. Frewen, on the contrary, flung herself conversationally between them and talked rapidly until the young man turned to Hersey. It was early, and tea would not be coming for nearly an hour.

Suddenly Hersey said, "You look pale, Mum, darling——"

And Barnes saw that the lady was indeed very white.

"Yes, I am tired, but I shall be all right, dear."

A few minutes later the girl repeated her remark. "Mayn't I get you some aspirin, or something? You *are* so pale. I can see your head is bad."

Mrs. Frewen raised her hand to her brow. "No, no, dear," she answered, nervously. "I'm quite all right, really."

Hersey's face hardened into a curious immobility that Barnes had once or twice before seen. "Mother, dear, I am sure you are not well," she insisted.

Mrs. Frewen rose. "All right, then. I give in. It is warm here—I'll go for a turn in the Square. The air will cure me."

No one moved or spoke for a second. Then Hersey said, "I don't like you to go all alone, darling."

Mrs. Frewen turned to Barnes. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind coming with me, Michael? Sir William will excuse us—and——"

"Dear lady," Sir William hastened to say, "but of course, of course. You are really looking very seedy."

"Thank you," murmured Hersey, giving her hand to Barnes for a second, "it is the only thing that ever helps her—fresh air."

Barnes went out on to the landing while Mrs. Frewen put on her hat, and as she joined him he gave a slight start. On passing the sitting-room door, Hersey's voice reached him, plaintively sweet: "ever since I was a little child," she was saying, "he is *such* an old dear."

Evidently she preferred not to tell Humphreys of their engagement. That suited him perfectly, but—Barnes did not quite like being called "an old dear."

"I am *so* sorry to—to have made such a fuss about a little headache," Mrs. Frewen said, as they went out into the dull afternoon, "but——"

"You didn't make a fuss at all," he answered, anxious

as he always was to be just. "I hope the air will do you good."

But the air was powerless to bring the colour back to her wan little face. Barnes glanced at her once with real concern.

"I must look awful," she said, trying to smile; "you actually look sorry for me!"

"Why shouldn't I be? You are plainly not well——"

"No, I am not well; but, as I say, I must look really very seedy for *you* to notice it."

Good Lord! Was she going to try and flirt with him? The impatient sensation she so often gave him came back with a jerk. She was really a fool; she never could let well enough alone.

With an effort he answered her words, disregarding his own feelings. "I am not very observant, it is true. But—I hope the air is helping your head——"

"Michael," she burst out suddenly, "it wasn't my head at all. I—I am worried, that is why I got so white. I—I didn't wish Sir William Humphreys to come to see us. I dislike him."

"Do you? So do I. He is a detestable creature. I tried to tell Hersey, but—she wouldn't listen to me. That is why I didn't at once offer to come out with you. I—I didn't want to leave her alone with him."

They had come back to their own door, and Barnes was about to put her key into the keyhole, when she arrested him by a sigh.

"You—you went to work the wrong way with *her*, I mean. She—she is a little headstrong—like all young girls. But, try to make her promise not to see him. I didn't like his influence on her when we were in Italy—not that it was anything of importance, but—you know, Michael."

"I'll tell *you* why I dislike him," said Barnes, mentally

trying to plan how inoffensively he could repeat his conversation with Humphreys, "and you tell her."

She gave a short laugh. "How blind you are! Can't you see that *I* am powerless?" Something in her face made him very sorry for her for a minute. Then he remembered, and all his pity swung back to Hersey's side.

"It was only—the young cad told me that—that Hersey had tried to—to 'bag' him at Bordighera."

She drew a deep breath. "Is that all?"

"'All'?"

"I mean to say, of course, that's what he thought. She—she liked him, she was very young, and bored to death—I was ill and couldn't go out——"

"I thought she said it was she who had been ill," he interrupted, sharply. He was sorry for her, but being lied to dried up the spring of his kindness.

"Oh yes—she had been," she assented, in a vague voice. "It was dull for her, and—she was too young to know what he, a very rich young man, not well bred, would think—— You mustn't mind what he said Michael."

"I mind! My dear Violet, you don't think for a moment that I believe it? Absurd."

"Of course—of course. I think if you tell her what he said," she continued, as they went up the stairs, "that she may promise not to see him."

"I'll tell her."

Hersey was sitting by the fire when they entered, her cheeks very red, her hands fluttering restlessly over her lap. Humphreys greeted them with effusion. He hoped Mrs. Frewen's head was better; he was so glad to have found them in; he was glad to have seen them again after such a long time. He might be in Bordighera again before long, he was going abroad in a day or two——

"*Are you?*" asked Hersey, in obvious surprise. "Why,

you said you were going to hear 'Butterfly' next week!"

"Yes—yes, I forgot, for the moment. Fact is, I am going off for a lark with two other fellows—Monte and Nice—this rotten climate is too much for me."

Suddenly remembering an urgent engagement, he took his leave, and a short silence fell.

"Michael doesn't like him, Hersey," Mrs. Frewen said at length; "and—men are the best judges of each other."

Hersey flushed suddenly. "Oh, I don't for a minute doubt that you know more about men than I do, Mother," she began; "but——"

"Hersey!"

The girl turned and stared at her lover, hardly able, it was plain, to believe her ears. "Wh—what is it, Michael?" she asked, as the door closed, very quietly, behind her mother.

"That is not how you ought to speak to your mother," said Barnes, sternly. "Go and beg her pardon."

"Go and—— I will do nothing of the kind, Michael," she answered hotly; "and I think you ought to beg mine. I was never so spoken to in my life."

"I do beg your pardon, dear, but—your voice and manner—frightened me."

She was unappeased. "Frightened you, did they? I can only repeat that you owe me an apology."

He looked at her in surprise. "I did beg your pardon. Didn't you hear me?"

"Then—say it again." She was trembling from head to foot. "Say it again. I—I *hate* you. You are an—a—a boor, a—a——"

The door opened and Violet Frewen came in. "Hersey, darling, come to me," she said, in a voice Barnes had never heard her use. She put her arms round the girl and stroked her hair gently. "Hush, dear," she murmured, her white curls pressed against Hersey's brown

ones, "try not to tremble so. It is all right—you misunderstood——"

Suddenly Hersey burst into such violent sobs that her mother could hardly hold her.

"Go, Michael," Mrs. Frewen said, hastily; "*please* go. She is not well—she has been very nervous for days. I—I will write to you to-night and tell you how she is. Please go."

"Hersey, dear," he said, disregarding her, and laying his hand on her shoulder, "don't cry. You will make yourself ill. Come and—forgive me. I should have seen that you are not well—darling——"

But she clung frantically to her mother, shaking him off in a fury.

"Go away—go away—I hate you—I—I——"

"Michael, please go," pleaded Mrs. Frewen.

And Barnes left without another word.

IX

Barnes was more distressed by the scene than he cared to admit, even to himself. He realised that his voice and words to the girl had been very stern, but he knew that they were no sterner than she deserved.

Her manner to her mother, even admitting everything, had been odious, and he had been honestly shocked by it.

If Hersey had been merely angry he would have thought little of it, but she had behaved in a way that nearly frightened him. He was too just not to admit the possibility of the scene's having been one merely of nerves, but his justice reacted on himself, as it always does. He could judge, nay, he could not help judging, her treatment of him as fairly as he did his of her, and he knew that her furious violence was unjustified as well as unbeautiful.

He took a long walk on leaving the house, thinking it all over, and at last succeeded in bringing some kind of order into his brain. She had had no proper unbringing; she was, apparently, very highly strung; and the sad fact that she did not respect her mother was not her own fault. That must be forgiven her.

He, a mature man, did not respect Violet Frewen, and he realised fully that this influenced his way of regarding her slightest act. So what could he expect of Hersey, comparatively speaking a child, and a child sore with her sad knowledge of her mother's character.

"I was too severe," he decided, erring as all generous minded people do, to his opponent's advantage. "What I meant was right, but my manner was wrong."

At the hotel, when he returned there just in time for dinner, he found, as he had expected, a letter from Hersey.

"DEAR MICHAEL,—Can you forgive me? I am so sorry. I get like that sometimes. I did when I was a child, and I honestly can't help it. But I will try. Please forgive me.—HERSEY."


Forgive her! He smiled over the childishly worded note. If love could not forgive a fit of temper, he reflected as he dressed, it would hardly be worth the name of love. Two hours later he rang at the door in Bloomsbury.

"Yes, the ladies were in. Miss Frewen was in bed, though," Gwendolyn informed him. "She 'ad been took bad that afternoon and had gone to bed."

"Oh, thanks, then I'll not come up—"

But as he spoke, Mrs. Frewen appeared on the stairs and called him by name.

"Please come up, Michael," she said "just for a moment."



When they stood together in the sitting-room, she began hurriedly—

"I want to be able to tell her that it's all right. She's asleep now."

"Didn't she get my note? I sent it the moment I had hers. I—I went for a walk before going back to the hotel."

"Oh yes, she got it. But—I want to talk to you for a few minutes, Michael. I am so sorry about this afternoon."

Resignedly he sat down and listened. He could have told her all that she had to say. Of late he had occasionally forgotten how much he disliked her—that was her power, her charm. Her pretty manners, her gentle voice, made for comfort; and the woman who makes a man comfortable is in a fair way towards winning his liking. And that afternoon there had been something in her way of holding her girl in her arms that gave him a little pang of sympathy, as well as of pity.

But now here she was at it again, making her graceful little scene, telling her pretty little story, rearranging matters as she fain would have them, and as they were—*not*.

"She is very nervous," she said once, and he broke in almost rudely—

"I have seen no signs of it."

"No—but she is. And—this kind of weather, so damp, you know—always upsets her."

"It hasn't been damp for many days."

She started. "Well—I mean to say—you can't call it *fine*, now can you?"

"I can't, because I am an American. If I were English I no doubt should. It's the best we've had since I came over."

She gave a little artificial laugh. "How quaint and

literal you are. Can't you understand that a young girl just engaged to be married can be a little nervous and—moody, without its being a crime?"

"I have not accused Hersey of a crime—or even of a mood," he returned impatiently. "It's you who *will* talk about it."

She was about to answer when Hersey's voice reached them through the door.

"Mother? Mother, where are you? I'm not going to stay in bed another minute."

"Hush, dear, I'm coming."

As she went into the dark bedroom, the girl went on, almost savagely: "I am quite old enough to decide for myself and I tell you I am going to-night——" She broke off short, as if she had been told that a third person could hear her.

Then she went on: "I don't care if he is. If I choose to go and see Lady Gussie, he can't mind——"

Barnes caught no more, and was about to knock at the door and speak to her, when a pearl that he wore in his tie fell out on the hearthstone with a little clatter. He stooped, picked it up, saw what it was, and then folding it in a bit of paper that lay on the rug, put it into his pocket.

"Michael?"

"Yes, dear."

"Have you forgiven me?" Her voice was the sweet voice he loved, and very close to the door.

"Dearest—yes, of course. Come and talk to me."

The door was opened a little. "In a minute. I have been asleep. I cried my face into a jelly. Now I am going out! Aren't you curious?"

"Going out?"

"Yes. *Please* be curious!"

"Can't. I heard you tell your mother. Why go to

Lady Gussie to-night? It is half-past eight already."

"I know. I'll come out in a minute."

When she appeared she wore a frock he had never seen—a quite new one. He knew that her mother had bought it for her with money he had persuaded her to take for the purpose.

"Do you like my frock?" she asked, obviously not in the least guessing whence it came.

"I like you in anything," he answered; and she added gaily, "except in a temper!"

Then she put her arms round his neck and for the first time kissed him of her own initiative.

"Then you really forgive me? I am so ashamed," she whispered.

His heart seemed to melt and warm his whole being. "My dear—my beloved—of course. I love you, Hersey."

A moment later Gwendolyn appeared to tell them that the taxi was at the door.

"I hate Lady Gussie to-night," Barnes declared; "but little spoiled girls must have their own way, I suppose. I'll drive you there, and come for you—at what time?"

"No, thanks. I am not a bit afraid of going alone. And—I want you to stay with poor mother. I—I was so beastly to her, Michael; and I don't want her to be alone all the evening."

"But, darling—I'll come back if you like, only let me take you to Lady Gussie's door——"

She put one hand on each of his shoulders and looked seriously up into his eyes.

"Dear Michael," she said, "*please*. I have cried so, I am tired out, and I really prefer to go alone. It will rest me. And if I know poor mother is being amused I shall be much happier. I *was* so horrid to her."

Barnes put her into the taxi and gave the man Lady

Gussie's number. Then he went slowly back into the house, and up the stairs.

He was both too old and too young to love caprice for its own sake, but he was too kind to inflict himself on the girl when she so frankly admitted that she was longing for solitude. He went quietly into the empty sitting-room and sat down by the fire. Mrs. Frewen had not returned since she had gone into the bedroom in obedience to her daughter's call.

He was in no hurry to see her, and lighting a cigar he leaned comfortably back in his chair and smoked. Presently something disturbed him: a short sound that he could not place before it died away into silence.

He smoked on. The quiet was unbroken, save for the very semi-occasional passing of a taxi or a cab; and the ticking of the clock served, as it often does as a recorder, rather than a breaker, of the silence.

A funny freak of the child's to go tearing off across London at that time of night to see old Lady Gussie!

Possibly she was doing it as a penance. Girls have sometimes those strange little ideas, and he knew that she did not like Lady Gussie. There was the strange sound again. It came from the door on his left.

A third time it came, and this time it was unmistakable. It was a sob. Some one in the bedroom was crying. Mrs. Frewen, of course.

He rose, and made for the door on the landing. She probably did not know that he was there. He would escape at once. Then as he took hold of the door-knob words reached his ear—

"O God, help me! God help me! I have done my best and now——" the sobs broke out now in piteous *abandon*.

For one second Barnes was conscious of a suspicion that she was "up to something," that she knew of his

presence. Then with a feeling of shame he knew that he was cruel and unjust in the thought.

"I have done my best; I have lied, and lied, and schemed," went on the mourning voice, broken with sobs terrible to hear, "and I have failed, I have failed. O God! Let me die, let me *die*."

Barnes stood still. What should he do? It would distress her, no doubt, to know that he had overheard her, and yet it seemed hardly human to go and leave her in such agony of mind.

He turned and was about to go to the other door, when he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and instinctively went to meet them, closing the door behind him.

To his amazement it was Alfred Cox, dishevelled and excited looking.

"You!" cried Barnes, stupidly.

Cox stopped. "You? This is the first bit of luck I've had for weeks. Look here: is Mrs. Frewen here?"

"Yes—but—she is—unable to see any one."

"Ill? Oh, my Lord!"

"She's not ill, but—— She doesn't even know I am here. Is anything the matter, Cox?"

The young man leaned against the wall, his pleasant face haggard and anxious.

"You are *sure* she's in?"

"Of course I am."

"But—she may be dressing to go out——"

"She is not. If you must know, something has happened which distresses her very much. She—she is crying in her bedroom."

"Then she really *isn't* going out?"

"No, she certainly isn't. For God's sake, Cox, stop being mysterious and tell me what the trouble is."

Cox swallowed hard and feebly arranged his tie. Then he said with an odd little laugh: "The trouble is, that

Hersey is at that chap Humphreys' rooms in Cavendish Square."

X

Barnes stared at him as if he thought he had taken leave of his senses. (Which sentence may, owing to the peculiarities of our language, be read in two ways, either of which suits the situation perfectly.)

"At Humphreys' rooms?" he repeated. "Nonsense. She is at Lady Gussie Calmady's in Kensington Square. I saw her off in a taxi not twenty minutes ago."

"I don't care how many taxis you saw her off in. She is at Humphreys' rooms. I saw her go in myself." Cox spoke obstinately, but quite without resentment. "I—I thought that perhaps she was meeting her mother there—it *might* have been. It was at least worth *hoping*. So I came—to see."

Barnes had gone as pale as the other man.

"Yes—it was worth hoping. You say you yourself saw her—go in?"

"Yes. I was passing on my way to interview a man in Harley Street, and I saw her pay her taxi and run up the steps."

"You—— Mightn't you have been mistaken?"

"No. Is it likely?" asked Cox, sharply. "She was dressed in white and had on her mother's black cloak with the chinchilla collar——"

"Yes, that's right—well, what's to be done? Wait a minute." He stopped speaking, and stood for what seemed to the younger, more impatient, man an absurdly long time in deep thought. Then at last he said slowly: "Mrs. Frewen must come. I'll get her."

Cox nodded, and Barnes left him, going into the sitting-room without knocking, and then rapping lightly at

the bedroom door, from behind which no sounds now came.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Michael. Violet, I must speak to you. Please don't stop to—for anything. I—it is important."

For a second she was silent.

"Is it about Hersey?"

"Yes. Come quickly."

She obeyed him, standing in the full light, her face red and swollen, her hair in wild disorder.

"What is it?"

The extreme expressiveness of her anxiety failed, for once, to annoy him. She was always more expressive than was necessary, but he did not, somehow, this time doubt the reality of the terror that distended her eyes.

"Cox is here. He saw—Hersey go into Sir William Humphreys' rooms. We must go and get her: you and I, Violet."

She turned away and did not speak for a moment. He could see her figure stiffen with the effort she was making to control her disorganised nerves.

"Can you come, at once?" he asked, gently.

"Yes. I'll get my things."

Three minutes later they sat in Cox's taxi, speeding towards Cavendish Square. Cox had remained behind. Neither Mrs. Frewen nor Barnes spoke until the taxi had stopped. Then Barnes said: "You must be gentle with her. And if possible we must make *him* think that you knew she was coming— No, she had better have told me, perhaps. However, we shall see, and we must take our cue from what we *do* see. Is Sir William Humphreys at home?"

"No, sir."

"He is—to me," said Mrs. Frewen calmly, from behind her veil. "Tell him Mrs. Frewen, please."

The servant hesitated. Plainly he had had no orders for this contingency. Suddenly a sound of music came from upstairs and a girl's voice singing a music-hall song.

"It is a party," whispered Mrs. Frewen to Barnes, in French. "Thank God!"

"Just take Mrs. Frewen's name to Sir William, will you?"

Barnes's voice clinched matters. "Very good, sir." The man let them in and switched on more light. "Will you step this way, Madame? I will tell Sir William."

They sat down in a small reception room, which was evidently exactly as it had been in the late Sir James's time.

"It's all right, Violet, you see. It's—just a foolish freak——"

"Yes. Just a foolish freak," she repeated mechanically, trying to smile. "She—couldn't resist a party, you see. After all, she is very young——"

"You needn't try to pacify me," he said in a voice that struck himself as very kind. "I am not angry—about the party, that is."

As he spoke the door opened and Humphreys came in. His face was flushed and his eyes were bright, but he came straight to Mrs. Frewen, holding out his hand.

"Please forgive us," he said, "I met her in a cab, a taxi—hers crossed mine in Piccadilly, and we were stopped by the policeman; and she told me she was going to Lady Gussie's, and I—well, I had one or two people coming, a married cousin among 'em, so I—I simply bagged her and brought her here. Please forgive us and come upstairs."

Barnes drew a deep breath. After all it was very simple, and not so very heinous.

"We'll not come up, thanks," Mrs. Frewen said, coldly.

"And Hersey must go home with me now. I have been very badly frightened about her."

"Oh—*must* she go? And won't you come upstairs?"

Barnes fancied there was a note of relief in the young man's voice.

"No. Will you kindly tell her at once? Mr. Barnes and I are in rather a hurry."

Humphreys, who had hitherto feigned not to see Barnes, bowed slightly. "Ah, how do you do? Very well, I will tell Miss Frewen at once."

When he had gone Barnes turned to Mrs. Frewen to speak, but something in her face arrested him. What did her expression mean? It was a very strange one, apparently composed of a mixture of fear, doubt, and disgust.

"Try not to be nervous, Violet."

"I am not nervous. Ah, here she comes!"

There was a sound of low, rapid talking in the hall, then Hersey came in, her cheeks burning with anger.

"Here I am," she said, roughly.

"Yes. Come."

Mrs. Frewen led the way in silence. Humphreys had disappeared; the discreet servant let them out into the darkness.

"I'll go to your door with you," Barnes said, as he helped them into the taxi. "That is, if I may."

"Please come home with us, Michael."

It was Mrs. Frewen who spoke. Hersey said nothing all the way, and in silence the three went upstairs. Barnes had forgotten Cox, and started at the sight of the young man who was sitting staring blankly at the fire, a gone-out cigarette loose in his fingers.

"It's all right, Cox," Barnes said, hastily. "It was a —party."

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"A party?" repeated Cox, forgetting to bow to the two women. "A party? Good God!"

There was a short pause, and then Hersey broke out sullenly: "Look here, all of you. I've got something to say. I am sick to death of being treated——"

Mrs. Frewen interrupted her. "Darling," she said in her gentlest voice, "don't speak now while you are angry. It is unfair to yourself. Remember, we were frightened to death. If you had told us about the party——"

Here she was, in her turn, interrupted by Barnes.

"You forget, Violet, that Hersey did not know about the party when she started to go to Lady Gussie's."

Hersey stared at him for a moment with a peculiar expression. Then she exclaimed suddenly—

"How on earth you found out where I was I don't know. Who told you?"

"I did, Hersey—Miss Frewen, I mean to say," answered Cox. "I happened to see you go in and——"

"Oh, *you!*" The scorn with which she stared at him was so very insulting that Barnes stepped forward.

"Mr. Cox was quite right in what he did, Hersey. Remember he did not know Humphreys was giving a party—and that you met him in Piccadilly——"

There was a pause.

"Did you meet Humphreys in Piccadilly?" Cox asked, taking up his hat and stick, and looking at her in a strange way.

"Yes." Her voice was very sullen.

For a moment he continued to stare at her, a queer little smile on his lips.

"Oh, then, I have only to beg every one's pardon and say good-night."

No one attempted to stop his going, but when the house door had slammed behind him, his presence seemed to be still among them.

"Strange he didn't see Humphreys as well as you," Barnes spoke slowly.

"He went to open the door, while I paid the taxi-man," explained the girl.

Mrs. Frewen said nothing.

"Oh, I see."

They had not moved from where they first stood on beginning the conversation. Hersey, nearest the door, beautiful, sulky, resentful; Mrs. Frewen pale, her eyes still red, her lips set in a straight line; Barnes with a frown on his face, his hands behind him, his head bent.

Cox's spirit seemed to fill the room.

"Oh, if you don't believe me," cried Hersey at length, turning towards the bedroom door.

"I do believe you, Hersey," Barnes heard himself say, to his infinite surprise. "It was Cox who didn't."

When she had left the room, Mrs. Frewen came to him, her hand outheld.

"Michael," she said, "I—I thank you. You are very good. And—to-morrow she will know it, too."

"Will she? She doesn't think so to-night." His voice was sad; there was even a sort of wistfulness in it.

"I know. But you remember she wrote this afternoon—can it have been this afternoon?—and asked you to forgive her. She will again to-morrow——"

Her hand was still in his, her worn face upturned. A great wave of pity swept over him.

"Poor Violet," he said, kissing her hand. "You are very tired. Go to bed and try to sleep, and don't worry about *me*. There is no real harm in her going to a party without asking. And she was on her way to Lady Gussie, of all people! Remember that. Now I'll be off."

To his horror her eyes suddenly brimmed full of tears. If she wept he would, he said to himself, hate her again.

But she did not. Brushing the tears away with her hand, she laughed.

"You are right. I am tired out. Well, good-night. We shall see you to-morrow?"

"Yes. Good-night."

He went without more ado, and an hour later sat on the edge of his bed, thoughtfully winding his watch. As he did so, his eyes fell on a twist of paper that had dropped from his pocket as he took out his watch.

He picked it up idly and untwisted it. It contained the pearl from his tie-pin. For a moment he looked fixedly at the torn bit of paper. On it was written in a man's hand—

"Come if you possibly can.

" rather jolly.

" cerely,

"WILLIAM HUMPHREYS."

XI

When Barnes, in answer to Lady Gussie's summons, came out to her carriage the next morning, the old lady stared at him in frank amazement.

"My word, you look queer," she began. "I thought you would, but—— Get in and come for a drive with me, will you?"

Barnes tried to excuse himself, but the old lady was too much for him, and a few minutes later he was seated by her in her strange old yellow vehicle, rumbling solemnly through the streets, parkwards.

"I always believe," was Lady Gussie's way of opening fire, "that there is nothing like the truth. Sometimes," she qualified; "and this in one of the times. So I will tell you at once that I have just seen poor dear Violet

Frewen, and that she has told me all about everything."

"Oh," said Barnes, wishing that all interfering, helpful women were at the bottom of the sea.

"Yes, all about everything. Even that the little minx sent you a very pretty note this morning, asking to be forgiven."

Barnes was silent.

"Are you going to forgive her?"

Several people, bowing to the little old woman in her Victoria bonnet and her jetted "dolman," wondered who the man with her was. Barnes's face arrested attention that morning.

"Are you going to forgive her?"

"There is nothing to forgive in going to a party."

"Then what is there that you can't forgive?" After a pause, she added, suddenly, "Please talk to me, Mr. Barnes. I love Violet Frewen, and I want to help Hersey for her sake."

"We have all been trying to do that—to 'help Hersey,'" he returned grimly.

"Yes. People always will try, as long as she lives. Until each individual one of them finds her out. As you have found her out," she added, on his remaining silent.

"What do you mean?" His voice was so stern that even her brave soul quailed a little.

"I don't quite know what I mean, Mr. Barnes. But *you* know. In some way you have found her out. And that is what is hurting you so."

"You are right. It is that that hurts. It hurts to find any one out, but when one has felt about a person as I felt about Hersey——"

"I know. What is it?" the old woman asked, gently.

"A lie."

He saw a laugh flit over her face, and then she was grave.

"She is the greatest little liar on earth, Mr. Barnes." Presently she went on: "Suppose I tell you about them—all I know, I mean. Gerald Frewen was my great-nephew. Hersey does not know this, but he was. And when he married Violet, I called. None of the others did. Perhaps that's what made me. And—I liked her. I didn't see her again till after his death. She was very brave, very 'head-high,' as the Germans say, and I liked her again. Then, poor dear, she speculated, and lost most of her money. I offered to help her, but she wouldn't let me. And, whatever your optimists may say, that is a most unusual thing."

"I don't feel particularly optimistic this morning," put in Barnes, with a gloomy laugh.

"No, but you are. Well, she, Violet, has lived in poverty all this time, denying herself everything to give a chance to—that little *beast*. Hersey is hard-hearted, selfish, and has the temper of a fiend. This, I suppose," she added, with a dash of malice, "amazes you."

"No," said Barnes, slowly. "Two days-ago I shouldn't have believed you."

"H'm. Well, you do now, which is the main point. Violet has done her level best to give the girl chances to marry. She was engaged to a very nice fellow, a Scotchman, two years ago, but *he* found her out somehow, and broke the engagement. Miss Hersey then promptly fell very ill and had to be taken to Bordighera. Then Billy Humphreys turned up. Violet couldn't bear him, and quite rightly, too. But for some reason or other he fascinated the minx, and she set all manner of traps for him. Master Billy, however, though quite off his head about her, had no idea of marrying her, and cleared out. Whereupon she behaved in the most abominable way to her mother, and ran away from Bordighera to Paris, with some impossible Belgians she had met in the hotel.

"Violet went and brought her home here. Then young Cox, whom, I am told, you deeply cherish, came along. And then when she was bored to tears by him——"

"I came along. I see."

"Yes, you see that much, but not everything. Here is the interesting part. Violet and I were discussing you in her sitting-room the day after your first appearance. She told me that you were very much taken with the girl, and I advised her to marry her to you. She told me you had money, and so on, and that you were what we benighted islanders call a decent sort. The minx was in the next room, unbeknown to us, and heard all that we said. The next day she honoured me with a call and pumped me. I let her pump," added the old lady, with a thoroughly unamiable chuckle. "I exaggerated your riches, and told her that the girl who married you would have everything in the world she wanted."

"She didn't tell me what she meant to do, but I knew that she was after you. A few days later, Violet told me of the engagement, and I met you at tea. I confess that I felt a trifle ashamed of myself——"

"I don't wonder," put in Barnes.

"Oh, only because I liked you. And when Violet told me what you unconsciously betrayed to her, of the going on the stage plan—she had no more intention of going on the stage than I have—I felt what some old lady in Joseph's time—or was it Benjamin?—when that excellent young man was sold, with her connivance, into the hands of the Egyptians."

Barnes laughed in spite of himself. "You are too flattering to me and too hard on her. After all, she is very young," he said.

"Bosh? She's twenty-five, though she doesn't know it. The trouble is, not that she has schemed for a rich husband, and then told him a lie. The trouble is that she

can't tell the truth to save her life, and that she will plot, and scheme, and lie till she is nailed down in her coffin. Well—you adored her. And you pitied her for having 'such a mother.' Oh, *I* know. So did young McFarlane, for a time. So did Billy Humphreys, just at first. I suppose she told you she 'didn't quite understand' about her mother. Bless your heart, she has known all about it for years! She 'wanted to get away,' and so on? *Toute la lyre.*"

Barnes did not answer.

"I understand. Well, when Violet suggested your marrying the minx, you snubbed her horribly. She told me all about it. And then I pumped her. All hands to the pumps, you see. And I found out without her knowing, that she had seen whither your thoughts—your perfectly idiotic thoughts—were tending, and that 'to help Hersey' she encouraged you to think all sorts of things about herself. Didn't she now?"

"She—she told me certain things——"

"Yes. Suppose you tell me them?"

"I can't. I have no right to."

"Did she name any names to you?"

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly.

"Well, she lied to you. I gathered that she had said something of the kind. The stories were absolutely false; started by a girl who wanted to marry the Frenchman, who, mark you, asked Violet to marry him. Poor Violet, she is *such* an ass."

Poor Barnes, unused to English as she is spoke by the better classes in her native land, nearly fell out of the carriage, and the old lady laughed.

"'Horrid old woman,' ain't I?" she asked with a chuckle. "Well, let's call her a goose, then. You'll admit she's a goose?"

"I don't know what she is," he answered with a troubled face. "I feel as if I had never known her."

"Perhaps you haven't. You might find it worth while trying. As you think over the last month you must remember many things both in her and in Hersey that puzzled you. Don't you?"

"No, nothing puzzled me at the time," he said, simply. "I—just believed in Hersey. But now I see that—I remember one or two things that——" He broke off short, troubled by the realisation of his own gross injustice towards Mrs. Frewen.

He had been as great a fool in disbelieving every word Mrs. Frewen said, as he had been in accepting the girl's lightest utterance as Gospel truth.

"Well," concluded the old lady as the carriage stopped, "you had better take my word for it that poor Violet Frewen is a good woman, and that Hersey is, to be particularly mild, a minx. She wants to see you—Violet does. So I've brought you."

Barnes got out of the carriage obediently, and stood bareheaded in the sunlight.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I—I am sure you—I am sure——"

"That I have not meant to be so offensive as I have been." The old lady's face wrinkled into a kind laugh, and then became serious.

"Be kind to Violet," she said, pressing his hand. "She has lied too, but it has all been because—it was her way, her poor, self-sacrificing way, of helping Hersey."

XII

Mrs. Frewen was alone in the sitting-room when Barnes knocked at the door.

They shook hands somewhat constrainedly, and they sat down.

The sun was stronger than usual that day, and the curtains being drawn back the room was more fully lighted than he had ever seen it. And for the first time he perceived how shabby it really was, and the pathos of the attempt that had been made to hide the shabbiness.

Suddenly, too, he noticed that Mrs. Frewen's grey gown was old and worn, that the lace at her throat was mended in several places.

"Hersey is out," she said. "She will be back soon. She—she wrote to you, didn't she, Michael?"

"You know that she did, Violet. You saw the letter."

"Oh—how did you—you have seen Lady Gussie," she faltered, clasping her hands nervously.

"Yes."

"Michael—she is a dear, but—you mustn't believe quite all she says——"

Barnes burst out laughing. "So she is a liar too!"

She shrank back in her chair as if from a blow.

"Oh, don't!"

He was watching her closely, now, "I beg your pardon," he said, after a pause. "I beg your pardon, but—don't you think the time has come for us all to tell the truth, Violet?"

"What do you mean? If you mean that Hersey——"

"Hersey has lied to all of us. And you have known it. You knew last night that she was lying about having met Humphreys."

She was silent.

"I found out in a curious way, as people find out things in books. He wrote to her yesterday evening, she told you she was going—and—you quarrelled about it. Then you let her go—to Lady Gussie's!"

"Michael—I couldn't help it. I tried, indeed, I did."

"I am sure of that."

He paused, remembering the words he had heard her

say after Hersey had gone, when she believed herself alone. Yes, she had done her best, he knew.

"But you let her go. Why did you not tell me?"

"Because—I wanted you to marry her."

"Her insisting on going to a party would not have caused me to break our engagement."

"No, but—after what you told me about Sir William—and—if I had told her you wouldn't have let her go—and——"

She looked at him piteously, but he only said, sternly, "Go on."

"There would have been a row, and—oh, you don't know how she can be. I didn't dare let you know, Michael. I didn't dare let you see her—in a rage."

"I see. You prevented it in the afternoon. I remember."

"Yes."

There was a long silence, to end which he asked gently, "And now, Violet, you don't mind my knowing now?"

Her eyes were dim as she again looked at him.

"Now—either you no longer wish to marry her, or you love her so much that—nothing matters, Michael."

He rose and moved restlessly about the room.

"Which do you hope, Violet?" he asked presently from near the window, where he stood looking out into the street.

"I hope—I hope—which ever will make you the happier."

"Me?"

"Yes. Oh, Michael!" she went on desperately, speaking very fast. "You have been so good, you *are* so good. Although she is my own child, I must say it. Unless you love her utterly, with your whole strength, you mustn't marry her. She—she is not—not——"

"Don't, Violet," he broke in harshly. "For God's sake, don't say it."

Then he saw in the street below Hersey and a man coming along together. The man was Billy Humphreys. Barnes turned away from the window and approached the fire, but he did not speak.

It seemed a long time before the girl came in.

When she did, he asked her as they shook hands, "Where have you been?"

"Shopping. Here are the things, Mother, dear."

"Alone?" continued Barnes, carelessly.

"Yes."

It was a small test, most unimportant in itself, he felt, but decisive at the same time.

"Hersey," he said quietly, "do you wish to marry me?"

"Do I wish——"

"Tell me truthfully exactly what you wish."

"Michael!" She looked at him, her beautiful face so fresh and glowing and young, full of amazement. "I have asked your pardon—what do you mean?"

Violet Frewen sat quite still in her chair. Barnes glanced at her before he went on.

"Our engagement stands, if you wish it—but on one condition."

"What do you mean? On what condition?"

"If you marry me," he said, heavily, "you must not lie to me."

"Michael!"

"Hush, Violet. No, please don't go. You must hear what I have to say to—your daughter. Listen, Hersey. You lied just now in saying you were alone. Sir William Humphreys was with you. You lied, or accepted his lie, and used it, last night, in saying you met him by chance in Piccadilly. As a matter of fact, he wrote and asked you to come——"

"Mother knew I was going," murmured the girl sullenly.

He made a gesture of disgust. "Don't blame your mother. Before you came to me with your story of going on the stage, you heard your mother talking to Lady Gussie—saying that I—that I had fallen in love with you."

"It's that old *cat*——"

"Wait a moment. During our engagement you have been flirting with young Humphreys. Now, if you marry me I will stand no lying, and no flirting."

The girl recovered herself suddenly. "This is," she said deliberately, "a very clever way of breaking our engagement. It is a pity that you have wasted so much brain-power in a perfectly unnecessary way. I am only too glad to give you your freedom. Here is your ring. Mother, it is quite true, I was with Billy Humphreys. And—I love him. I have always loved him. Oh, I know he's not noble and—and—*splendid* like Mr. Barnes, but he suits my degenerate taste.

"And here's another thing. I know as well as you that he didn't want to marry me. And I also know that he *will* marry me. Here is a note he brought me to-day from his aunt, Mrs. Nevill-Curtis, asking me to visit her in the Isle of Wight. He is going and I am going—I am going to-morrow. The next thing you hear of me, will be that he and I are engaged. O—o—o—o," she added, in a funny high key, to Barnes, "*how* you must despise me, and what a narrow escape you have had!"

She stood with a hard smile on her lips, looking at him with all the insolence she could muster. Then, quite suddenly, she burst into loud sobs and rushing to her mother, knelt by her, and buried her head on her waiting breast. Her crying was not natural, and it frightened Barnes.

But Mrs. Frewen said gently as she caressed her child, "Please go now, Michael."

And he obeyed her as he had obeyed her the day before. But with what different feelings. The day before he was just beginning to doubt his own distrust of her; to-day—his eyes were wet with pity for her, his heart full of remorse and shame for his long misunderstanding. Well—he was free now, and could go back to America. He went to the booking-office, and arranged to sail the next day but one.

He would go home where he belonged, and try to forget the storm and stress of the last few days. He was very tired, both mentally and physically. He would go to bed early to-night—he would——

But at dinner-time came a note from Mrs. Frewen. Would he come, please?

Of course he went. In any case he would have had to go to say good-bye to her.

"Hush," she said, her finger on her lips as he went in, "she is asleep. It was a dreadful attack. She cried for two hours and then talked, and talked—poor child, she knows she has behaved badly. She—has always lashed herself into furies like that ever since she was old enough to speak. And—she makes herself out much worse than she is. She is—dreadfully fluent."

Barnes took her hands in his.

"Violet," he said, "I want to ask your pardon. I have misunderstood and misjudged you from the very beginning, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself. You lied to me about yourself, but I was only too willing to believe you. I—will you forgive me?"

"Yes, Michael," she answered, simply. "And you must forgive me. If I had not tried to marry Hersey to you, you would have been spared much suffering;

but—I knew you were good, and kind, and wise—and she is my child.”

“I have not been either good, or kind, or wise,” he returned. “But—I will be in the future—I will try to be, I mean, if you will have me for a friend. Will you?”

She hesitated for a moment, and then said slowly, without looking up, “Yes, Michael.”

Then they sat down and he told her that he was going home.

“I thought you would. It is the best thing for you.”

“The best thing for me? Yes, that is what you *would* think of.” He was lighting a cigarette, and paused to look up at her from the lighted match as he spoke.

“When does Hersey go?”

“To-morrow morning, Michael. She really does love him. God knows why, but she does.”

“Yes, I believe that.”

“If only you are not very unhappy,” she went on.

“I? No, Violet. You see, what you said was right. If I loved her wholly and with all my strength, it would have been all right, or, as matters have turned out, all wrong. But—I didn’t. If I had—well, it would all be very different now. It must have been her face that turned my silly head. God knows I *thought* I loved her, but——”

There was a long pause. “And when she has gone you will be all alone, Violet? Or Lady Gussie——”

“Lady Gussie goes to Italy on Monday.”

“Oh well, they will be gone, and I shall be gone. Whom will you have?”

Her lip shook for a second. “I? Oh, I shall be all right.”

Barnes rose. “I must go now,” he said, “but I have changed my mind. I shall stay in England for another month.”

"No, no, Michael," she said quickly. "You mustn't—not on my account——"

"I think," he answered, "that it will be more on my own account. I am—rather lonely, Violet. I think I want—a friend. Shall we be friends, you and I?"

Half-shamefacedly he looked at her. Subconsciously he knew that he was asking for more than friendship; and, also subconsciously, he wondered if she knew it.

But she answered gravely, looking up at him.

"Yes, Michael, we will be friends."

KER KEL

I

"KER" means, in Breton, house; and Kel? That we do not know.

Is it the name of some fabulous princess, who lived in the days when the great trees, still growing, the peasants believe, under the blue waters of the Bay of the Forest, were in their prime? If so, one fancies her in blue, with long copper-coloured hair folded over her shoulders like wings. . . . Or is it the name of some stream? Kel! At all events, it is a beautiful, romantic word, and stands for a romantic and beautiful spot. For the house (and Ker is pronounced Kair) is the least part of it; one sleeps under the roof, but one lives on the terrace or on the beach.

II

HOW WE FOUND IT

One day, walking along the dusty highway, I came to a farm on the sea side of the road, past which lay a shadowy and winding lane. It was a lane which must inevitably lead to adventure, so I turned down it.

The sunken, rough road lay between high thickets of ripe blackberries—which fruit the Breton peasant never eats, as he believes the Redeemer's Crown to have been made of its thorns. And perhaps it was, who knows?

Pausing now and then to pull down a straggling branch, black and heavy with berries, I arrived finally at the end of the lane, which was the sea. A small pink

and green house, facing it, turned its back to me, and passing it, and turning sharp to the left, I found myself facing the house. On the broad stone terrace under the awning sat three Frenchwomen.

They were clean and cool-looking. I was hot, dusty, dishevelled, and, I found later, rather black about the mouth from my blackberries. They stared down through the railings at me, and I up through the railings at them.

Then I blurted out: "Of course, these ladies have no wish to let their house?"

And as one woman they answered: "How remarkable—we have!" So I was metaphorically taken, travel-stained as I was, to their immaculate high, crêpe-adorned bosoms, and they showed me the house. I loved it at once, if only for the singular presence in such a place of a Morris chair, that I am convinced first saw the light in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

It was all new, all very clean, all bare, as houses by the sea should be. Also, the mattresses pleased me.

Then as to the price. The eldest of the three ladies suggested, with some hesitation, two hundred francs a month; they felt, I could see, bold, if not rather unprincipled, in asking so much. Therefore I looked grave for a moment, before I held out my hand and said: "Done! We have no need for deeds, and lawyers, and such-like tiresome things, have we, madame? My name is Madame de Hutten, and I will send you my cheque for four hundred francs to-morrow."

"My name is Madame Vally—et c'est entendu, Madame." So we parted with many compliments and much madaming, and I went, unseeing, back through the hot dust to the hotel; for had I not acquired, through a blind following of my star, the most beautiful home in the world for the most beautiful months in the year?

III

THE BEACH ITSELF

It is a beach that lies like a fallen crescent moon at the edge of dark cliffs. The horns of the crescent are of high and tumbled rocks that prevent ingress to my little kingdom at all but the lowest of low tides. The sand is hard and white, and little peasant boys in black velvet jackets and broad black velvet hats come and rake up, every day, quantities of strongly sea-scented seaweed, which they carry to the farm where it is used as bedding for cattle, etc.

Across the bay, leaning over the water, lies Concarneau, beloved of painters; while, far to the right, at the end of the huge crescent which holds our cove and many others in its mighty arms, stands, on a bare headland, the Beg Meil semaphore. This headland, too low to be grim, too high to be tame, reminds me of Cape Cod, which I have never seen. . . .

IV

YANNEC, THE COOK

She wears a small Elizabethan ruff of fine-plaited linen, against which her sunburnt neck looks like red leather, and a white cap with stiffly starched strips of linen, curved like antennæ. Her skirt is blue, her bodice of black velvet. She is as deaf as a post.

This deafness I pitied, regarding it as an affliction, until I found that it is, rather, a quality; a distinction. She enjoys it, and takes in it a pride that would be more fitting had she caused it herself.

One day I was told that she wished for a day's leave

of absence to go on a pilgrimage, and I went into the kitchen to ask her whom she destined to cook for us during her absence. It is difficult to talk to her, because, though I bawl at the top of my lungs, I can rarely make her understand me, and in her bright, mouselike eyes the joke is all on me. I suspect her, even, of pretending to be harder of hearing than she really is, deafness being to her so exquisite a gift.

When the matter of the pilgrimage was settled to her satisfaction, I bellowed that she ought to see a doctor about her hearing.

"I did, Madame. The doctor at Quimper. He said he could cure me. I was to go twice a week for three months to be treated."

"Well?"

"Eh bien, Madame," she explained, putting on her sabots, "I was to pay two francs a visit. So I did not go. Not so silly, I! I preferred to be deaf and keep my twenty-four francs."

Tous les goûts sont dans la nature!

Yannec rises at four, and invariably goes to sleep with her head on her arms on the kitchen table, as soon as supper is over. Jeanne, my personal maid, and the only other servant in the house, usually "washes up" for her, because that is easier than rousing her. Such sleep is indeed a gift.

One night at about eleven we were terrified in our beds by a most hideous and ear-splitting noise. It sounded, my Irish friend called to me from her room, as if some one were attacking the foundations of the house with a view to destroying it.

I called to Jeanne, who appeared, convulsed with laughter.

"It is Yannec, Madame!"

"But what in the name of all the saints is she doing?"

Jeanne did not know, but went down to see. The walls of the house of Kel are apparently made of paper, so we could hear from the kitchen Jeanne's protesting voice.

Then Yannec replied, and—the pounding began again.

Unable to bear with the noise, or my violent curiosity, I rushed downstairs, to hear Yannec say equably, between two blows that shook the world: "It is impossible, Jeanne, that these ladies should hear me. I am not making any noise!"

So said I, sternly: "Yannec, what in the name of St. Mary, St. Joseph, and the blessed Infant Redeemer, are you doing?"

"I am splitting up this box, Madame, to burn—as I am not sleepy." She was barefoot, and one foot was planted firmly on the thick plank; her little axe she held poised while she spoke.

"But—Mademoiselle and I cannot sleep, while you make such a noise of Hell," I returned.

"Oh non; I do not make a great noise, Madame. Madame is perhaps nervous? As for me"—she raised her great arms, whose muscles I could see move under the polished brown skin—"I like a little noise like this. It makes me gay!" . . .

Pleasantly, she is relentless. And I am more or less wax in her hands, for she is an excellent cook; but I proudly state that she now chops wood by daylight! . . .

Sometimes, at about nine, while I am drinking my tea in bed, and reading Horace Walpole's *Letters*, there comes a knock at the door and Yannec enters, bearing a large lump of raw meat.

"Does this please Madame?" she asks, thrusting it at me; "the butcher waits."

And then and there I have to decide. I could not face the scorn Yannec would have for me if she knew

my ignorance as to the relative complexions of raw beef, raw veal, and raw mutton, so I never know till twelve noon (at which hour she allows us to eat) of what meat we are going to partake.

Her sense of humour differs from mine. The other evening she dashed into the dining-room (which is also the drawing-room) to show me an egg that could not become part of an *omelette aux fines herbes*, for the reason that it was already nearly ready to roast as a chicken.

She was extremely pleased when my Irish friend and I did not enjoy the sight. *Tous les goûts sont dans la nature.*

V

LEADS UP TO THE PARTY

Amongst many—very many—parties which she and I have together enjoyed, my Irish friend and I shall always refer to the one about which I am now going to relate as The Party.

To relate the tale, I must begin with the studio party at Concarneau. It was a large and very jolly party, but I shall not describe it because it does not quite belong to Ker Kel. *The Party* does.

At the studio a tall, bearded man played the violin in a way that pleased me, and an enchantingly pretty little Frenchwoman sang, well. For some reason I took them to be man and wife.

Now, Reader, who I hope is to read this rambling chronicle, you must understand that these French people of whom I write are not of the kind you see lunching at Henri's and dining at the Café de Paris. They are of the *petite bourgeoisie*, and would tell you so, quite happily, as they told me.

At the studio-party there were French people of other

classes, but so far as I know they were unmusical; at all events they did not attract me; so it was the bourgeois fiddler I invited to lunch the next day but one.

To my amazement he clapped his shabby heels together and said: "Mit grössten Vergnügen, meine Gnädigste!"

An Austrian!

The pretty woman with hair like two raven's wings enfolding her beautiful little head, was *enchantée*.

Presently a plain, clever-looking woman who had played the piano in a quartet of Gabriel Fauré came to me.

"Madame has had the kindness," she said, "to invite my husband to breakfast. I am delighted to—to *lend him to her!*"

It is dreadful to be accused by wives of wishing to borrow their husbands; particularly when one doesn't. So I elaborately, and with much hand-play, assured her that I had been guilty only of the indelicacy of taking *her* coming for granted.

Her simplicity, under the obligatory varnish of manner demanded by French politeness, was delightful.

Then there appeared out of the crowd of vague personalities a little man with a wonderful brow, and wonderful eyes. He looked like Max Beerbohm done in sepia.

"Madame de 'Utten?" he asked.

"Oui, Monsieur."

"Madame has kindly invited my wife to lunch on Friday——" It was a complete repetition, in contrary sexes, of the speech of the lady in brown. *He* was the pretty woman's husband!

Then at various times, after various *conciliabules* in corners, one or the other of the party came and asked me to invite another sister; another brother; another

brother-in-law. And with a fine recklessness I invited them all.

VI

THE PARTY

Friendliest of creatures the expatriate American, a fine example, arrived first in his car. The car contained, beside himself, a large variety of bottles, ice, and a cocktail-shaker!

Then came the Danish widow, a little lady of indefinable and innocent charm; a creature of simple merriment and as sincere sadness; and an American painter whom I am proud to call my friend.

"The French people won't come, you know," the younger American told me, shaking his silver bottle, "they will only have thought you mad for asking them."

"I'll bet you what you like," I returned, "that they do."

And they did.

They came, the dear people from Concarneau, across the bay, in a large and shabby sailing-boat, and when I waved from the terrace they waved hats and handkerchiefs, and little by little their friendly, frank faces came into view.

They landed only about a hundred yards from my terrace; I went down across the sands to meet them, and one by one the women were lifted out—with much screaming and laughing—by the men.

I should have said that the ladies were lifted out by the gentlemen, for these are the words I learned that day to put into every remark, whenever and wherever I could. Each lady inquired as to my health, and I as gravely asked for news of hers. Then the same ritual was gone through with each of the gentlemen.

When we were all satisfied on this point we went up to the house.

Each lady had to be persuaded to take off her coat and the scarf that had protected her coiffure from the rigours of the voyage from Concarneau. Then they all—*messieurs et dames*—had to be persuaded just to try a cocktail. And I (of whom my brother once said that I always, at my own parties, treated myself as an honoured guest) had to do all the persuading.

But they were so charming, so frankly having a wild spree in lunching at the house of an American Baroness who writes novels!—that I grew quite to enjoy pressing food and drink on each one in turn.

And now comes an incident to describe which I could wish to have genius. Because while it is to me as beautiful as anything I have ever read; while beside it Sir Walter Raleigh's spreading of his cloak for a Queen to step on, fades into what nowadays would be called mere swank, yet it must be told in words simple enough to convey the simplicity of the mind that conceived the deed.

The little man who looks like Max was the hero. There was no heroine, because I was to him, M. Thomas, not myself; I was only a rather mad, but hospitable American lady, living on the shores of the Baie de la Forêt, without a piano.

M. Thomas: Madame, a reçu le piano?

I: The piano? Non, Monsieur, malheureusement I have no piano!

M. Thomas: Madame, I—I knew you had no piano. So—I have lent you mine.

I: Lent me? . . .

M. Thomas: Oui, Madame. I sent it from Concarneau at nine. I sent it by bullock-cart . . . It should arrive at any moment. . . .

It arrived at half-past twelve, and was installed in one corner of the room.

Was this not a beautiful act of chivalry? . . .

At the end of lunch, which I had cooked largely myself, and which I shall always be proud to remember my guests enjoyed, one of the In-laws started up. A little man with a self-effacing manner and very hobbly American shoes.

"Madame," he said to me, "the piano of my brother-in-law is, I fear, out of tune. Shall I tune it?"

"But—but *can* you?" I stammered.

The little man drew himself up with pride. "Can I?" he answered. "Well, considering that I am a *piano-tuner!*" And tune it he did.

Then, from four to six, we had music. The beautiful young woman sang of Brahms, of Schumann, of Fauré; of the songs of Brittany.

The Austrian, whose face seemed to emerge gradually as he grew more at home from his wilderness of beard, played the fiddle like an angel. He also played the piano, and *well*.

I thought, as I listened, how interesting we should have seemed to any one passing in a boat—for the tide was high. Across the pale-green railing of the terrace that possible sailor would have seen heads of many types, and of both sexes; through the yellow linen curtains of the little room, with its carved oak Breton furniture, he would have seen a crowd of happy, listening people; while to him in his boat, across the sound of the waves, would have come glorious phrases of Wagner, of Brahms, of Debussy, of Verdi, and fragmentary bits of the other Gods.

* * * * *

The moon was coming up and the sky was rose-coloured when my dear guests left.

They went, with a renewal of their politeness of arrival, but somehow their compliments and bows seemed

no longer funny. I found myself making compliments and bows as best I could, and wishing that it were better. . . . I shall never forget The Party.

One or two members of it were old and dear friends; but it is not of them that I think when I think of it.

It is of the eight French bourgeois and bourgeoises; of their kindness; their feeling of adventure, so obvious; of their music; and, finally, of their departure in their big brown-sailed boat, at sunset; of their called and waved adieux; and of their gradual disappearance in the dusk, as night crept up from the sea. . . .

VII

ABOUT THE MATCHES

One dark night Jeanne came to me in consternation.

"Madame," she said, "there are no matches."

"No matches?"

"Oui, Madame; not one."

This was a tragedy, and her deep soft voice carried the sense of horror to one's farthest consciousness.

It was really rather serious; four women all alone in an absolutely unilluminable house by the sea in Finis-terre. We consulted, and finally Jeanne suggested sending Yannec to the farm for matches.

An hour later Yannec returned, flushed and pretty though mouse-eyed, and drew from her bodice a bit of newspaper out of which she produced four matches. "The farmer's wife will put them down on the account of Madame," she said. To her, used to Breton thrift, it was a serious business contract, but my little Rita and I as nearly had hysterics as we have ever had in our lives, and Jeanne the Parisienne mopped her eyes.

The next morning, however, luck was on my side.

My match and the match of Rita had refused to light.

They had not flared up and gone out; their horrid little heads had, on being applied to the box, simply crumbled away without a vestige of flame.

I was very triumphant. Myself, I toiled up the lane to the farm. Here I found the farmer, a remarkably handsome man, busy with that joy of his soul, his manure heap; while his third wife, very pretty, and inexpressibly sluttish, was feeding the pigs.

I bowed gravely, received their meteorological observations with respect, and then I produced the two failures.

"These matches," I said, "did not light. You will perceive that they did not ignite even for a second."

The handsome farmer (he smelt of cider) took them and inspected them. Then he handed them to his wife.

"Well—the man," she said to him, ignoring me, "what do you think?"

He shoved his black velvet hat to one side and scratched his head. "Well—the woman—they have *not* lighted. What she says is true——"

"Eh bien?"

He dug his fork deep into the beautiful and valuable source of wealth that lives under his front windows:

"You'll have to take them off the bill," he grunted.

I went exulting down the lane.

Possibly the tenth of a cent would be solemnly taken off my bill!

It was, and the farm people now treat me with a quite new and very great respect. Which is pleasant.

VIII

ABOUT THE RATS

I have always believed Hell to be a cold place; a place of chilly winds and unavoidable draughts. This opinion

is not, I recognise, particularly pertinent to the episode of the rats, except that it is probably indirectly suggested by my feeling that the rat, not the serpent, should be used as the emblem of evil. The serpent, though a criminal, is a more or less respectable creature, and often he possesses beauty. Whereas the rat is a fool and a cowardly outcast, equivalent, in the animal kingdom, to the slinking wretch who kills old women or little children for a few pence.

His only danger, that of poison from his bite (given only at the last extremity, when his natural defence of evasion is beaten down), is comtemptible. I had far rather die from the bite of the meanest snake than from that of a rat.

And on coming back from London to Ker Kel, one night, I was greeted with the news that the cellar was alive with rats and that Jeanne had met two—as large as rabbits—in the living room! Jeanne was terrified, but it appeared that Yannec had no fear of rats, and as to mice she had profited by my absence to catch several *with her hands*, and start taming them. Yannec declared that only idiots feared rats and mice—and she may be right. We, however, Rita and I, were sufficiently idiotic to be badly frightened, and the next day saw us interviewing Madame Garronot, my landlady, in Quimper.

She was concerned, and promised cats and traps, but I wanted an immediate remedy.

So we bought two metres of wire netting with a very fine mesh, nails, and a hammer—and a dreadful packet of poison.

Then, our hour and a half's homeward journey; a journey through the lonely Breton countryside, lined with apple-trees gravid with splendid red fruit, or Gothic pine-trees; a road leading past a tidal river brown after recent rains, only the higher stretches of sand still show-

ing silver in the amber sunset lights. We passed through small villages, where little girls dressed as women dragged tiny brethren from under our apparently ruthless wheels. We passed an old priest carrying the Viatikum to a dying citizen of France, a little boy with a merry face preceding him, ringing a bell that somehow did not sound sad.

Brittany is a country full of lovely poetry done into prose. . . . Finally we reached home, and Jeanne met us to tell us that during the post-meridian quietude the rats had been holding high revel.

"Have they?"

I produced my wire netting, my hammer, and my nails, and we covered the cellar doorway (there is no door) with the netting.

In the meantime Yannec, in the kitchen, became lyrical. "Ça grimpe," she cried, "that climbs, the rat! It climbs over all! It will not at all regard the netting. It will mock itself of the efforts of these ladies!"

However, we completed our work, and ate our supper with the appetites of conscientious and hard-working workmen. . . .

Late at night we heard a noise downstairs and called Jeanne. That handsome girl was nearly in convulsions with laughter.

"Madame—it is Yannec! She prepares the sandwiches for the rats! Fifteen she has made, with a prayer for each. Fifteen!"

All night my little Irish friend and the little Scandinavian widow heard the onslaughts of the furious rodents on the wire netting.

(I slept through it all, hushed into heavenly peace, as always, by the music of the waves.)

And in the morning Yannec pounded her unmistakable pound on my bedroom door.

"Entrez!"

"Madame—si madame veut voir les rats?"

Did I wish to see the rats!

In a dressing-gown I followed her down with timorous feet. And there, on the stone floor between the kitchen and the drawing-room they lay not without the certain dignity that death seems to give to all creatures, five very large rats.

I did not approach them. They made me feel that my breakfast (which I could smell!) was a totally unnecessary thing. But they were dead. Mine enemies had partaken of my Death to Rats, and Death had claimed them.

"You had better bury them, Yannec," I suggested faintly.

She turned on me the full force of her wonderful smile.

"Madame need not fear," she said, kindly, "*they are dead.*"

And I crept back to my room imbued with shame. Why should I be afraid of rats and this poor peasant girl not?

However, this was the fact, and I did not grudge her her triumph, for it was a just one.

IX

THE GHOSTS

"The great law of compensation." That is one of the favourite phrases of the American painter whose friend, I have already said, I am proud to be. And this great law, applied to Yannec and me, brings solace to my soul.

For whereas I am afraid of rats, and she is not, she is afraid of ghosts, and I am not.

Last night, at the moth-hour, I sent her through the greyness to the farm, to fetch some cream. She came back, poor fluttering, substantial thing, her sunburnt face pearly over with sweat, her breath coming almost in sobs.

By chance I met her. There she stood at the kitchen door, the belated dahlias shining red in the little garden behind her. Her eyes were wide with fear.

"What is it?" I asked. (Roughly, for I was frightened.)

"Madame—un revenant!"

"Nonsense—there *are* no ghosts! What do you mean?"

She crossed herself, there in the dusk.

"Madame—I have seen a ghost. The ghost—of a woman who died without a confession."

"Yannec—listen. The priest will tell you that ghosts do not exist. God is too good," I said, slowly, "to let poor souls come back here."

She shook her head in its pretty cap. She pitied me for my ignorance. "O Madame, every one knows."

"Then tell me," I said, gently. And she told me.

At the farm, where a child was ill, she had waited ten minutes for her cream. It was dusk, but not dark. She could see quite clearly the big dog, the geese, and the pigs. And the farmer's wife. Also the farmer, who was very drunk. Then, carrying the jug of cream with care—not to spill any cream, and thus waste the money of Madame!—she had started down the lane. And suddenly there came through the thicket on her right—the thicket through which no human thing could pass, the ghost. It was a little child in a black frock—"like all children, Madame"—and a lace cap. And it wore sabots. And it was crying. It was crying for its lost soul. The soul of a woman who died without confession. Her

soul was in purgatory—and it had come back to ask for prayers.”

“How do you mean, Yannec?” I asked her in as kind a voice as I could find, for I wanted to cry.

“Many, many prayers, Madame, will help her poor soul. But——”

She broke down then and wept, her broad shoulders and her muscular sunburnt neck making her weakness somehow the more poignant.

She would, she assured me, have a mass said for the *poorre âme*. That would help.

Then she went in to cook our supper.

This morning, just at daylight, I heard a noise and crept out to the landing to see what it was.

It was grey dawn. The sea was still white in the greyness. The fields against which the little black figure was outlined, were still as grey as the sky. The church I knew was at Fouesnant, a good hour's walk. And she must be back at seven for our early tea, a form of dissipation, I knew, congenitally abhorrent to her.

— And I knew that she was going to church to pray for the soul she believed she had seen in the dusk the night before.

And I wished that I could have gone with her to pray for that poor soul. She must have felt so happy as she came back in the new October sunlight to her servitude to me and mine for a very small sum.

She had prayed, and helped a wandering soul.

* * * * *

The coffee was bad, so she was scolded, but even as I scolded I thought of her early prayers in the chilly church and I envied her.

MRS. HORNBEAM'S HEADDRESS

SIR ALFRED WELLDOME stood on Mrs. Hornbeam's doorstep, waiting for Bridges to open the door.

He knew Bridges as intimately as a gentleman can know someone else's butler; he knew that William, too, would be in his place; that Hedley, the parlour-maid, would be in hers; that, upstairs, Antoinetta, Mrs. Hornbeam's invaluable maid, would be giving the last hurried, but all-important, touches to her mistress's toilette.

Even, it occurred to Welldome as he waited, he knew that Mrs. Bramble, the priceless Bramble, would at that moment be serving up the dinner aided by Annie, the kitchen-maid.

"By Jove, I do know a lot about 'em," the handsome, elderly baronet reflected, smiling to himself. "It's ridiculous that I should know even the kitchen-maid's name—and that she squints."

He sighed suddenly, and the odd feeling of unrest that had of late so frequently, though briefly, oppressed him, descended on his spirit.

When he had said good-evening to Bridges and William he went, as usual, to the small drawing-room, and, also as usual, sat down by the fire to wait for his tardy hostess.

It was May, so the room was full of yellow roses and irises. If it had been November the old oriental bowls and vases would have been filled with orange and yellow chrysanthemums; Mrs. Hornbeam hated pink and blue.

The large fireplace was filled with seawater-soaked logs that spurted little green and iridescent flames, as if the very colour of the sea had got into them. On the

floor lay enormous square cushions; there was a black one, a black-and-gold one, and one of vivid green, just too blue to be emerald.

As usual, too, the air was fragrant with some Indian incense, not sweet but pungent and nearly acrid.

Welldome lay back in his comfortable, black satin chair, his well-moulded grey head in the shadow, his long legs stretched towards the firelight.

Thus had he sat, he reflected, many hundreds of times in the last ten years. It was, as a matter of fact, exactly ten years that night since he had met Xenia Hornbeam, and to celebrate the occasion they were dining alone together, and going to the Russian opera.

Welldome did not like Russian music; he loved Verdi, and his favourite opera of all was *La Bohème*, but he had not seen it this year, because Mrs. Hornbeam loathed Caruso's voice, which she called luscious. To-night it was to be *The Wave*, a new opera, in which all the artists were fish, wearing scaly tails and consequently never standing up. Welldome knew that the composer had for this masterpiece invented a quite new scale, and new scales made his head ache. "Fish-scale," he thought, consciously idiotic.

However, Xenia loved going, and he loved Xenia, so there was an end to it.

Again he sighed, gently, the wrinkles round his dark eyes deepening for a moment. He was going to ask her to marry him that evening, and he smiled as he told himself that it would be for the eleventh time.

He was forty-five, and he wanted a home, and he would, he decided, tell her to-night that he was tired of waiting.

She came in silently—she loathed noisy people, and always wore slippers with velvet soles—and stood beside him until he looked up.

"By Jove!" said he, springing to his feet.

"Then it's all right?" Her vermilion lips stretched prettily over pretty teeth, but her eyes did not move.

There was not a line in her face, and yet he knew that she was only two years younger than himself.

"It's—it's—magnificent," he declared looking at her dress with brave, lying eyes.

His eyes, as well as his tongue, had in this matter of her dress, been lying for years. His basic taste in dress was simple, but she loved the startling, and achieved miracles of brilliance in colour and oddity of line, which he obediently admired.

She never doubted his sincerity, for she believed too utterly in her own taste ever to suspect his not sharing it.

To-night she wore a skin-coloured sheath of silk, on which were sewed millions of tiny opalescent scales that gleamed and sparkled in a thousand colours as she moved. On her head she wore a kind of crest of flamingo feathers, about a foot high, and between her eyebrows, suspended on a tiny black silk cord, was a huge fire opal.

"You like it, Alfred?" she asked, complacently.

"I love you, Xenia. You are beautiful."

They went in to dinner at once, and Bridges and William served it with unmoved faces; they were used to their liberal, considerate mistress's extraordinary "get-up," as they themselves expressed it, and William no longer had to rush from the room at the sight of some of them.

Mrs. Hornbeam was an ugly beauty, her heavy black hair was magnificent, and her pale grey eyes were arresting under the broad black brows. Her nose was very flat and wide-nostrilled, while the natural pallor of her smooth lips was invariably hidden under the reddest of lip-salve, which she used lavishly and frankly.

Her long thin hands were beautiful, and she wore only one ring, a huge *cabochon* emerald which adorned her right thumb.

Welldome enjoyed his dinner, but over dessert his hostess leaned across the table towards him.

"No, Alfred," she said, smiling. "I won't."

"Won't what?"

William removed his plate as she answered—

"What you are revolving in your mind. I won't!"

She laughed gaily—her gaiety was as natural as her kindness—and held his eyes with hers.

But he did not laugh. "Will you not, Xenia?" he asked.

And William remarked a minute later, in the pantry, to Bridges that Sir Alfred was proposing again and that he, William, could not understand it.

"And London bu'sting full of pretty girls!" he concluded.

"If a man wants to marry Mrs. Hornbeam," Bridges answered, wisely, "it stands to reason no pretty girls are going to draw 'im. She's an acquired taste, Mrs. H. is, but she's a terrible 'abit."

William laughed. "She's a sight this evening, all right, in them feathers. Outlandish I call it."

"Serves 'er purpose, the birds and beads she puts in her 'air," returned the butler. "If she wore ordinary clothes who'd look at 'er. With that nose like a cuttlefish? At 'er age, too!"

Meantime Sir Alfred had been refused for the eleventh time.

"My dear man," she said, kindly. "I simply couldn't marry you."

"But—I love you."

"I know. And it—your love—means 'much to me. You must never go away and leave me; I couldn't bear

to lose you; but I don't want to be married. I am, so to speak, a born widow."

"I am not a born bachelor, dear."

She looked at him meditatively, the flamingo feathers stirring.

"No. You are—shall I tell you what you are, Alfred? You are a born sigher; a born wooer. Yes, that's it, my dear, a born unsuccessful lover!"

She rose with a brilliant laugh, and he followed her to the drawing-room. His dark face was a little set, as were his lips under the ram's-horn moustache that gave him a strange look in that clean-shaven year of our Lord.

"Now, dear old thing," she said, as Bridges left them alone with their coffee, "don't look depressed! I *haven't* forgotten ten years ago to-night, and—in my own way I *do* love you. Only—marriage? No!"

He bowed, and after a short pause answered slowly.

"Very well. You say you love me, so I can't understand your refusal, but—we will not discuss it."

"Good boy. By the way, you remember my brother Nick?"

"The one who lived in Italy?"

"Exactly, the one with a genius for failure. He failed in oil and in rubber, and then in matrimony. Subsequently he died, you know; and to-day I find that he also failed in paternity."

"How do you mean? I thought he had a daughter?"

"That's exactly it! He *has* a daughter. Nicola her name is, and she arrived to-day to pay a long visit. My dear Alfred, she is the ugliest girl who ever lived, and the greatest frump!"

"Dear me," he murmured, absently. "That seems a pity."

"It *is* a pity. An ugly woman may easily have a mod-

est career," she went on with a comic smirk, pointing to herself, "if she discovers her own style and dresses up to it. Or a pretty girl *can* be a frump without absolute disaster. But ugly frumps ought to be beheaded at birth."

He nodded. "We've only ten minutes to get to Drury Lane; hadn't we better start?"

* * * * *

Wellcome was surprised on opening the door of Mrs. Hornbeam's box to find the box already occupied.

A woman seated at the very back of it, rose hastily as they entered, his impression of her being that she was flat-chested.

"O Auntie Xenia! I thought you were going to be late."

"My dear child, do you know," Mrs. Hornbeam answered cheerfully, as she slipped off her leopard skin cloak, "I clean forgot you? Alfred, this is Nicola Nicholson, my niece."

Wellcome shook with Miss Nicholson, further observing that she was a hideous reproduction of her lively aunt, without any of that lady's vivid and almost preternatural charm.

She wore a clay-coloured garment, above which her Kalmuck face appeared nearly mustard colour, and her oily black hair was raked back at apparent danger to its roots.

"The Queen is here," she declared, as Mrs. Hornbeam stood at the front of the box, inspecting the house; "she is a frump, isn't she?"

"But *such* a good wife and mother," Mrs. Hornbeam retorted lightly. "Ah, there's Queen Alexandra. And how lovely she looks! Alfred, there's Lady Barnard in baby blue as usual, positively sitting on the edge of her

box. It is a piteous sight, a plain woman trying to look pretty."

Nicola grinned. Her grin was unabashed and vast.

"Wouldn't every one like to be pretty?" she asked.

"No! I for one would rather die. Ugly, yes, my dear, but pretty never!"

For a moment Weldome watched the niece watch the aunt. There was an odd expression in the younger face. The kind man was sorry for her.

"Are you fond of music?" He leaned forward, as he put the question which was the inadequate expression of his pity.

"No. I loathe music. But I like the opera," she answered and he wondered if she were quite innocent of sarcasm.

When the music began, he, in his usual way, made the best of things.

Leaning back in his chair he unobtrusively raked the house with his glasses. His eyes were excellent, and even when the lights went down he helped the time to pass in this innocent way.

Mrs. Hornbeam, leaning well forward, listened with rapturous attention, her vermilion lips parted, one gloveless hand on the edge of the box. What her whole personality seemed to express was Asiatic ecstasy.

At the first *entr'acte* the audience became affected by a gentle stir as, to continue in Oriental imagery, a field of corn stirs in the breeze: it had become aware of Mrs. Hornbeam's headdress.

"How they stare!" Nicola stared at the starers, but, Wellcome observed, from far back in his chair.

"What *are* they looking at?" the girl went on.

Mrs. Hornbeam, apparently oblivious of the attention she was attracting—attention almost, in its intensity to be compared to a small riot—remained motionless.

"My headdress, dear." Mrs. Hornbeam still did not move, for her attitude pleased her, and as she herself would have said, it would have been a pity to spoil the picture.

Nicola Nicholson shot a quick glance at Welldome. The glance said, "She actually likes it," so plainly that he answered it in words.

"Yes. It's that—that bird in her hair, and she does like it!"

Presently some one knocked at the door, and an oldish gentleman with little hair and a waxed moustache appeared.

He kissed Mrs. Hornbeam's hand.

"Dear lady," he cooed in a voice like the moan of doves; "what a success you are having! The Duchess has just been talking to me about it. She finds it too delicious."

"I am *so* glad! Dear Lord Perywinkle, may I introduce you to my niece, Miss Nicholson?"

Nicola fixed the mincing nobleman with unblinking eyes.

"Is there," she asked, "only *one* Duchess?"

Welldome, silent as was his wont when he had nothing to say, shut his eyes. Nicola was, he reflected, horrible to behold, but good to listen to.

For five minutes she and Lord Perywinkle talked: gravely as became clever fencers; unsparingly, as befitted two people in the thrill of a violent instantaneous mutual dislike.

"No," said Nicola, finally, "perhaps Italian Duchesses are not equal to English ones, but on the other hand I know seven Italian ones, and you apparently only one English one."

Lord Perywinkle bowed with a twist. Owing to an

increasing and irrepressible bulge of his waistcoat, he never stood sideways in an opera or theatre box.

"Ah no!" he murmured. "I said only that amongst my own particular friends the Duchess of Belmont is called for brevity's sake 'the Duchess' *tout court*."

If he expected a reply he was disappointed, for she said not a word, simply staring at him with a frown of such malevolence that Welldome, on opening his eyes to see what was up, fairly started.

"You are a minx, darling," Mrs. Hornbeam said, finally interposing. "Don't listen to her, Winks. She's only a barbarian."

Winks was old, but he was very virulent.

"You must," he said—kissing Mrs. Hornbeam's hand, in what was called in the society of mutual flattery in which he lived and moved and had his being "his own inimitable way"—"civilise her. It is hard to believe as she *is*, that she belongs to *you*."

"I don't," snapped Miss Nicholson, "and Horace Walpole died in 1757."

* * * * *

Two days later, Welldome called on Mrs. Hornbeam, to find her not at home. It was a rainy afternoon: cheerless, and without hope of clearing.

"Do you know at what time she'll be back, Bridges?"

"No, Sir, I don't."

The butler, after a second's pause, added with obvious kind interest, "Miss Nicholson's in the library, Sir, and tea's just gone up."

Nicola was as ugly as sin, and was sure to be wearing a garment that would wound the eye, but she meant tea and a little crusty cake the Baronet liked; also she would talk, and he need not look at her much.

So Sir Alfred went in, and three minutes later was comfortably installed by the fire in the little-used library.

"I really don't think I have ever had tea in here before," he said.

"No, Aunt Xenia hates it. She would, of course."

The girl glanced round the room understandingly as she spoke.

"Why?"

"Oh, well, it's—just a *room*, isn't it? It does not look like a temple, or a freak-shop, or—or anything but just a room. It was Uncle Bill's sanctum, and that, I suppose, has saved it."

She wore black. Welldome wondered how it was possible for some black to be so smart, and some so utterly hopeless as this.

After all, the girl's figure, such as it was, bore a strong resemblance to her aunt's—they were both very thin—yet Mrs. Hornbeam in black was as smartly startling as her niece was frumpish.

"Aunt Xenia's gone to a tea-party at that old jelly-fish, Lord Perywinkle's. Disgusting old gentleman!"

"Oh, come now, Winks isn't so bad!" laughed Welldome. "Why do you loathe him so?"

She took another bit of cake and looked at it as if on its rich surface were to be seen the answer to his question.

"Why? I don't know," she returned slowly after an interval of silence that seemed likely to last some hours. "Some people detest spiders, some toads, and some worms. I always detested worms."

After another long pause, she asked, absently: "D'you like antlers?"

Welldome, whose mind had wandered, stared and repeated the word.

"Yes, antlers. Things deer wear on their heads. Those over the book-case are fine ones. Uncle Bill shot the creature somewhere in Thibet."

"He was a famous shot——"

"He was, Aunt Xenia had lots of skins and things he gave her. They're packed away somewhere now. Some more tea?"

"No, thanks."

"Speaking of antlers, do you like Aunt Xenia's taste in dress? Headdress, I mean?"

She eyed him in an apparent frenzy of desire to know his opinion.

"Very much indeed," he lied; "don't you?"

"I don't know. I am not sure." She spoke with an air of deep earnestness, as if extremely anxious to tell the exact truth.

"She is awfully conspicuous, but she doesn't seem to mind that, does she?"

"No."

There was another long silence. Welldome rather liked these silences.

"I suppose," Nicola asked, breaking it at last, "that you never saw her in bed?"

"No. Never."

"Well—do you know, with her hair down, and brushed flat, and no—well, I suppose they are ornaments? she looks—quite ordinary. Like," she added gravely, "me."

"Does she indeed?"

"She does, as I might look if I weren't quite so poisonously ugly."

Welldome's old fashionedness found vent in the almost inevitable protest, "*My dear young lady!*"

"Well, she *does*. Lots older, of course, but at the same time like me. Wouldn't she," she added with a sudden chuckle, "be furious if she heard me say it?"

Welldome really could not envisage Mrs. Hornbeam's mental condition in this event, so he said nothing, and

presently Miss Nicholson continued in a new tone, a tone of friendly briskness—

"I suppose she never *will* marry you?"

He started. "Marry me?"

"Yes. You do want her to, don't you?"

This point-blank way of putting things rather upset Wellcome, which perhaps is not strange.

He lied about clothes to Mrs. Hornbeam, but he was basically a man of truth. He was also a man of dignity, and he resented Miss Nicholson's question.

While he hesitated she began again, "I am sorry. I should not have asked you that. Antoinetta told me, and I—well, I was just wondering whether, if she ever *did* say yes, I'd like you for an uncle."

Wellcome looked gravely at her.

"I accept your apology," he returned.

The long pause that followed was distinctly *his* pause, and as such she clearly did not enjoy it. She broke it by jumping to her feet and holding out her hand.

"I deserve that," she declared, "I am an impertinent fool; I was a spoilt child for twenty-five years, and I—sometimes forget that at twenty-six one must stop being one."

"It's quite all right," he protested, stung by the embarrassment experienced by most well-bred men when a woman apologises to them. "It was only—rather odd, you know."

"It *was* odd, and—so am I. We are all odd. My grandfather was nearly mad, you know—and—well, as to that, look at Aunt Xenia."

She laughed as she spoke, her strange little goblin-like chuckle. It struck him that she was goblin-like herself.

"Yes," he returned, stroking his moustache, "you *are* odd!"

"Did you ever," she returned, "see a picture of Aunt Xenia when she was young?"

The phrase struck him. "When she was young." Could it be that Xenia was no longer young?

The idea had hitherto never occurred to him, although he knew her age to an hour.

"No—no, I never have," he hastened to answer as he saw the girl waiting. "Is there one?"

She nodded, and going to the far side of the room returned with a small black-and-gold picture frame in her hand.

"My father painted it when she was twenty-four. Wasn't she—" she went on good-naturedly—"awful?"

She was, and poor Welldome, who was a slow-witted man, was confused by the simultaneousness of the three ideas that surged over his brain: that Xenia Hornbeam was no longer young; that at twenty-four she had been hideously ugly; that this Nicholson girl was, at twenty-five, absurdly like that Xenia Nicholson whom he had never known.

"She—has improved in looks," he stammered. "I never should have known this to be Xenia."

Nicola laughed.

"It wasn't," she declared, still with her air of high geniality, so like, he now realised, that of her indefatigable aunt. "Her name was Mabel then."

* * * * *

The next evening but one Mrs. Hornbeam gave a small dinner party, and after it there was music.

A gentleman, purporting to be a Lama from Lhassa, played on an instrument somewhat resembling a banjo. He also recited in his own tongue, explaining the meaning of the verses in excellent English, as he went along.

He took great pains to impress on his audience that he was not a convert, or, indeed, interested in any reli-

gion whatsoever, which was, every one felt, a great relief.

When this gentleman had left, there was a tango lesson, in which inflexible Britons emulated the joyous abandon of dusky southerners of the baser types. The tango in Spain is not a drawing-room evolution.

Nicola Nicholson was not at the dinner, and Well-dome had missed her.

For some reason he was not in good spirits, and Mrs. Hornbeam's guests bored him.

He loathed the Thibetan, and he longed to wring the neck of the little South American in wonderfully fitting trousers who was giving the tango lesson.

Mrs. Hornbeam herself seemed less delightful than usual. It seemed to him that she, as well as he, was not quite herself.

Lord Perywinkle, whom the cunning Nicola had at once perceived to be the ape of Horace Walpole, was being very venomous in his suave way. On the whole, Welldome breathed a solemn Thank God! when the clock struck eleven, and some inspired lady rose to go.

At that moment Nicola came into the room.

Welldome had missed her, but in his disgruntled mood his first thought on seeing her was one of impatience with her for being so idiotic as to wear, with that skin—as if she had the choice of several skins—a bluish grey frock.

"You look very dull," she declared gaily, as the tangoing was resumed. "What on earth do those poor dears think they're doing?"

"It's the tango."

"Ho!" she jeered. "Not it! I have been to Spain—with my father, and among other things I saw, that I shouldn't have seen, was—the tango. Oh dear!"

She spread her egregiously long fingers in mock horror before her face.

Wellcome did not answer her. He was wondering why, after all, he was not glad to see her.

"Aunt Xenia is not so bad," the girl pursued. "I believe she used to dance splendidly. Her hair's a bit tame to-night, don't you think? Nothing but the strings of opals under her chin. She ought to be able to do better than that!"

He looked at her, vaguely resentful. "I thought you didn't like her elaborate headdresses," he said.

"Did you, Sir Alfred?"

He reflected with irritation that the darkness of her eyes hid their expression.

"Yes, I did."

"Well—to say the truth, I don't think I do, much. Only—if one is going to be eccentric we might as well do it thoroughly; opals under the chin is the most banal advancement on Gaby's pearls. Unworthy of my aunt's great brain. She looks like—a poor imitation of herself!"

"And what would you suggest to improve her?"

She shook her head. "I don't know—or——" she gave a little hoot of irrepressible mirth, "I *do* know. But I won't tell you!"

He frowned. Mrs. Hornbeam was now dancing with Señor Enriquez, and it struck him that she was a little too mature for the steps and movements she was making.

"Why won't you tell me?"

"Because," Nicola grinned, the points of her dazzling teeth reflecting the light as, he remembered, Mrs. Hornbeam's had done the night he met her, "you are cross to be humoured."

He drew himself up stiffly. "I beg your pardon, Miss Nicholson——"

Her face grew suddenly grave. "Please don't, Sir Alfred! I'll tell you. There's that odd bird Uncle Bill shot years ago—it's stuffed, you know, and lives in a glass case on a landing of the back stairs——"

"Well, what about it?"

"It's—it's a golden-brown creature with orange-coloured breast, and the inner side of its wings is bright scarlet. It would be a worthy headdress for Aunt Xenia. It's hardly bigger than that flamingo thing——"

He rose.

"I must be going now," he said. "I am tired. Good-night."

To his surprise her supple hand closed on his with a sudden nervous grip of great strength.

"Now you are angry," she panted, almost as if she were struggling against tears. "You think I am disloyal to Aunt Xenia. I'm not. I—I *asked* you if you wanted to marry her——"

"What on earth——" he returned, losing his temper with a certain relief—"has that got to do with a scarlet-breasted bird? I am a slow man, Miss Nicholson, not having had the advantage of growing up in Italy——"

"Don't," she cried, in a fierce undertone, "stop. It's this. Aunt Xenia treats you horribly, and you love her, and—she will *never* marry you."

Feeling rather as if he had been suddenly set down in the midst of the Arabian Nights, he drew his hand relentlessly away from hers.

"She will never," she repeated, now as angry as he. "I know because I asked her, and she told me so."

Welldome turned away without a word. He was deeply hurt, but his feelings were not simple, and he must disentangle them when he was alone.

"It is true," Nicola went on, "she calls you—an old

dear. Are you content to be the old dear of—an old woman?"

Before he could answer, Mrs. Hornbeam, from across the room, beckoned to him with her huge crimson fan.

"You mustn't go, Alfred," she called, "we are to have supper in half-an-hour, and—I have had a letter from Jekyll that I must show you——"

Jekyll was her solicitor, and as usual Welldome obeyed his lady.

When he reached her side, he saw to his relief that the stormy Nicola had left the room.

"Xenia," he said, quietly, urged by a medley of feelings, one of which he vaguely felt, to his own surprise, to be chivalry, "surely you will me marry me one day?"

She opened her opaque dark eyes widely.

"My dear Alfred, what on earth has put that into your head," she cried, "it isn't your day for proposing!"

* * * * *

At half-past twelve the tango party had dwindled into three or four people, who, breathless and rather shiny-faced, congratulatory as to each other's dancing prowess, deprecatory as to their own, gathered in the dining-room for what Mrs. Hornbeam called a sandwich and a glass of champagne.

Lord Perywinkle was one of the faithful ones, and Welldome presently found himself seated, in the *sans façon* of the hour, between his hostess and the old Peer.

"You look out of sorts," Perywinkle observed, peeling a plover's egg. "Touch of liver, eh?"

He was at his most Georgian to-night, and presently launched forth into a current tale, of such scandalous nakedness of phrase that Welldome was uneasy. After all, he reflected with innocent irony, Miriam Baldock *was* technically a *girl*, whatever her presumed career and her actual manners.

"Stop him, can't you?" the Baronet said in an undertone to his hostess.

"Why?" She met his gaze with comically raised eyebrows and a pointed mouth. "Oh, Miriam? My dear Alfred!"

She was tired, he saw, but her vivacity did not fail. Suddenly he wondered how she would be when it did, as even hers must, sometimes. She would be as a warrior without his breastplate—or would it be a relief? Then he wondered whether he had wondered if the possible relief would be, in the eventuality, hers, or a possible beholder's?

The sandwich and glass of champagne took the form of a long and elaborate meal.

Towards the end Welldome found himself suddenly tired in a way he could not remember experiencing all his life. It was a fatigue of mind as well as of body. His very soul seemed to faint with weariness. Mrs. Hornbeam's vivacity became to him a thing not horrible only because it was unreal. She herself was unreal.

The feeling that came over him was so overwhelming that the man closed his eyes for a moment.

A sudden hush in the midst of the din caused him to open them, and following the eyes of the others to the door, he saw what had arrested their chatter.

Mrs. Hornbeam stood in the door. The real Mrs. Hornbeam. He knew now that for a long time the one he knew, whom that very evening he had, through a mixture of oddly ill-defined feelings, asked to be his wife, was not the real Mrs. Hornbeam.

She was, he realised in that odd silence, a kind of ghost, a survival of the Xenia he had fallen in love with ten years back.

And this vivid, pliable creature in a dress of red scales was the *real* one. On her head brooded a great

bright-feathered bird; she wore round her flexible shoulders a chain of roughly cut jet, a thing that, like a rope of pearls, hung nearly to her feet, and, almost invisibly suspended, a fire opal blazed between her eyebrows. She was an amazing figure.

"By God, it's Miss Nicholson!"

Perywinkle's exclamation broke the charm, and in the chorus of laughter and exclamations that followed, Alfred Welldome quietly wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and drank a glass of wine.

Nicola sat down bubbling with pride and delight.

"Yes, *ain't* I like her? You didn't mind my rifling your room, Aunt Xenia?"

Mrs. Hornbeam laughed gaily. "My dear, it's the very cleverest thing I ever saw in my life! But what on earth is the thing on your head?"

"It's that bird Uncle Bill shot in Kashmir—with the wings turned up. Isn't it jolly?"

The successful Nicola turned a look of delighted expectation on Welldome, but he did not meet it, and she went on.

"Sir Alfred and I were—discussing headdresses, and—I remembered the bird, and—and that's all!"

Perywinkle leaned forward. "Dear Mrs. Hornbeam," mellifluously, peering through his gold-mounted, square eyeglass, "do you know, you will have to look to your laurels? Miss Nicholson looks more like you than you look like yourself!"

Mrs. Hornbeam laughed. "Only because she looks as I did when I was young," she answered, "as one grows older one gets to look less like one's self, and more like—like the life one has led."

Welldome glanced from her to Nicola, and thence back to her. In a way he felt he had never so greatly liked Xenia Hornbeam as he did at that moment. She met

his eyes, and hers, so dark, so impenetrable, softened.

"Dear Alfred," she said, gently, laying her hand for a moment on his, "isn't she wonderful?"

* * * * *

Half-an-hour later, when the others had gone, Mrs. Hornbeam, Nicola Nicholson, and Alfred Wellcome stood together in the small drawing-room.

"Dear people," Mrs. Hornbeam said, "I am a tired old creature, but I *must* have advice about that letter of Mr. Jekyll. I'll just get this tight frock off and a tea-gown on, and come down."

She smiled at them and left the room.

Wellcome smoked in silence for several minutes.

Then Nicola said, "Well?"

"You are—wonderful."

"Yes—but was I right? *Weren't* the opals a failure? For her, I mean?"

"I suppose so."

"And—I *am* like her?"

He eyed her deliberately. "You are. You are like as—as——"

"As she used to be!" The triumph in her voice irritated him.

"In appearance. She was never—crude," he retorted.

"*Oho!*"

Her odd hooting laugh affected him against his will, and his lips quivered.

"You might as well laugh, you're dying to," she said, gaily.

His laughter died suddenly. "I don't quite know," he answered, with gravity, "whether I want to laugh, or——"

"I know!"

At Mrs. Hornbeam's voice they both turned suddenly to behold approaching them Nicola.

Nicola in the hideous blue-grey frock, her hair strained back from the roots, her face yellow, her wide lips pale.

"Yes—here I am," the new Nicola declared, much in the other one's voice. "Sir Alfred, isn't my Aunt—wonderful?"

There was a short pause and then the two women burst into delighted, unfeigned laughter at the poor gentleman's expression of piteous mystification.

"Upon my soul," he declared, "I can hardly tell which is which!"

Mrs. Hornbeam laid her hand on his arm.

"Dear Alfred," she said, "I am the old Mrs. Hornbeam, and this apparition of eccentric splendour is—the lady you met at the Harringay-Melton's ten years ago, and whom——" she broke off, smiling at him.

"Now, Nicola," she resumed, "you are doing a thing that I, with all my gifts, never could achieve. You are blushing! Alfred—I have always been devoted to you, but—I never blushed for you. Neither——" she went on pointing at his own face, her eyes dancing with a glee that made her, in her niece's hideous frock, uncannily like her niece—*"neither did you ever blush for me!"*

Nicola with a little sound that might have been a laugh, but might equally well have been a sob, galloped from the room.

"My dear Xenia," protested Welldome, lamely.

Her face very grave she came close to him and laid a hand on each of his shoulders.

"Alfred, my dear," she said, "don't you really know what is the matter with both of you?"

"Xenia——"

"She fell in love with you that night at the opera. I saw it at once. But—feminine vanity being what it is, I—had no hope. You understand?"

"Yes," he murmured, uncomfortably.

"I really believed that you and I were the exception, that you would go on loving me even when I am—old!"

She laughed a little sadly. "I couldn't have married you, dear," she went on, "but, do you know, I believe I enjoyed your wanting me to? It—made me feel young; I suppose! Perhaps it was that, your wanting me, that prevented me realising that I am old. Old for love-making and marrying and the like. I have," she added, simply, "often felt tired of late, but until to-night I never felt *old*."

Welldome put his arm round her and kissed her.

"Dear Xenia," he murmured, "you'll never be old."

For the first time in her life, she kissed him.

"You are right," she declared, gaily, with the gaiety he loved because of its sincerity, "I never shall, in some ways. As to you, dearest and best of friends, you must be grateful, for I have kept you young for Nicola!"

"My dear, you rush at conclusions——"

He flushed dully and frowned.

"No, I don't. And it isn't fair for you to be shy with me when I have dared to do this," glancing at her clothes, and touching her flat, tight hair, "for you!"

As he went down stairs five minutes later, Welldome stooped and picked something up.

It was a small, orange-coloured feather.

With a smile half-shy, half-triumphant, he paused on the doorstep in the dawn, and put the feather into his pocket-book.

THE COMMON MAN'S STORY

It was raining very hard and a violent and unassuageable wind buffeted the windows of the Golden Lamb in Chichester, that night just before Christmas of last year.

Perhaps that is why, after the few local revellers had drained their glasses, and gone home—each one letting in as he opened the door, a violent blast of wind—that the four travellers, whom Chance had brought together that night, to stay at the Golden Lamb till morning, drew their comfortable leather chairs nearer to the fire, called to Miss Pearson, the barmaid, to refill their glasses, and prepared for a further hour's talk.

These travellers were four in number, and roughly speaking, they may be described as the Gentleman, the Bagman, the Farmer, and the Common Man.

The Gentleman was small, rather wizened, shabby, and gifted with a tall, bony forehead that obviously meant brain.

The Bagman was likewise a small man, but his head was flat, and his eyes glazed with an habituality of too much spirits.

The Farmer was an old man with a fine face, marred only a little by the expression of determination not to be got the better of, as so many farmers' faces are marred nowadays.

The Common Man, whose calling was not very clearly to be read, was a tall, broad-chested fellow, with silky, scented black hair, black eyes of the lady-killing type, and a thick moustache under which, when he talked—with a very slight Cockney accent—there was observable a

play of over-red lips and snow-white teeth. There they sat for a while in the firelight, while Miss Pearson closed the bar, preparatory to making her way upstairs.

Each was busy with his own thoughts and his own bodily comfort, as the wind howled outside.

The Bagman broke the silence. "'Orrid night," he said, sipping his Jamaica rum and water. "Give me summer."

No one answered for a moment, and then, raising his large sad eyes to the Common Man, the Gentleman asked quietly—

"Why do you prefer winter nights to summer ones?"

The Common Man started violently, upsetting a little of his whisky-and-soda.

"I?" He nearly stammered as he spoke, and he distinctly flushed.

"Ay. Am I wrong?" The Gentleman's voice seemed to soothe the Common Man's agitation.

He leaned forward. "Well—no," he returned. "You are right, as it happens—only I was wondering how the deuce you know."

"I write stories," the Gentleman answered in his turn, "and I am trained to observe faces. That is all. I saw the thought pass through your mind."

"This reminds me," the Bagman spoke up, intrusively but without offence, "of one of Dickens' stories. Four strangers, you know, and the pub fire, and the storm."

The Gentleman nodded gravely. "So it does me. Suppose all you gentlemen have another drink with me, and we each tell a story. It is early yet, and the wind howls as only the great Dickens even could make us hear it on paper."

Miss Pearson, with a sigh, filled up their glasses. Then she said good-night.

The Farmer, who often passed through Chichester

and felt at home at the Golden Lamb, poked the fire and put on a large lump of coal.

Then every one was silent until the Gentleman spoke.

What he said does not matter, but first the Bagman, then the Farmer, then he himself, told a tale. When he had finished he turned to the Common Man.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you have some particular story in your mind?"

The Common Man's face quivered for a moment. "Perhaps I have."

"Will you tell it?" The Common Man's glass was empty, and as he spoke, the Gentleman poured a certain amount of whisky into it from a shabby silver flask he took from his own pocket. "Please tell us," he said.

* * * * *

"I am a stockbroker," the Common Man began. "I have a flat in Savoy Hall, plenty of money, and good health. As times go, I am pretty lucky. There are stories I *could* tell you——" He paused, and a peculiar smile came over his face.

"*Don't*," said the Gentleman.

"Well, I'll leave it to your imagination, gentlemen. I am forty-two, and you know London, and you know women. 'Nuff said! Well, I'm a bachelor. If I was a married man, my life 'd be different. I couldn't bear to make a woman suffer, and somehow or other, wives always find out."

"Ay," grunted the Farmer, lighting his pipe.

"As it is, I'm quite free, and so I amuse myself." He took a deep draught of his whisky-and-water and went on.

The wind shook the windows, the fire rose and fell spasmodically, but little by little the other two men followed the Gentleman's example and listened in complete silence to the Common Man's story.

"One day last June," the Common Man went on, "just as I was leaving my office, a friend of mine named Josephine—just Josephine—telephoned me to see if I'd dine and go to hear Mawry Lloyd at the Tiv. As it happened, I was free, and said so.

"My friend Josephine's a widow—a real one—and a *very* pretty woman. A friend of hers, whose name I can mention, as it's only Smith, lives in the same house, and one of my pals, a real topper, named Albert Brown. We four often make parties together. Congenial, you know—and perhaps a little more.

"That night, however, when I got to Josephine's little place, I found no Mrs. Smith, and instead, sitting by the fire, a strange woman. Girl, I almost said, she looked so young, and so—so sort of different."

He took another drink, his face contracting for a minute.

"I came in, you understand, very jawlly, and all that. Called out to Josephine were the cocktails made—and all *that*, and then this little thing got up and explained that her cousin was not quite ready, but would be in shortly.

"Her cousin! I almost laughed. Not that old Josephine isn't a jawlly good fellow, and all that, but"—he hesitated—"well, this Mrs. Blank—she told me her name—was different. Her husband, she said, was a clergyman somewhere in Surrey, and she had come up for three days to go to the dentist and have a good time. She said, like Americans do, 'a good time.' Well, she had it, gentlemen, her good time. She hadn't ever even seen a cocktail, so that helped her to get used to things, and she had only tasted champagne at her own wedding, four years before. She liked it, too!

"And she was as pretty as a child, as she sat there stowing away glass after glass of the Merry Widow.

"She'd never been to a Hall, and laughed till she was weak at some of the turns. We were all—sort of careful of her, too, I may say. Albert's apt to get a bit gay as the corks fly, but even he was careful what he said before her.

"Not a saint, you know. Not a bit of that, gentlemen. She was out for larks, all right, and made eyes at—Albert—for all she was worth.

"The bubbly went to her head a bit and then she told me that although she was very fond of Robert—that was her husband—she found life even duller at the Vicarage than it had been in her father's Rectory in Yorkshire. She missed her brothers and sisters." . . .

He paused, and, in the silence maintained only by the influence of the Gentleman's eye over the two other men, mopped his face with a blue-and-white silk handkerchief that smelt of new-mown hay.

"That was a Wednesday night," he went on presently. "Thursday she lunched with me—and Jo—and Thursday night we went to see Hawtrey. Friday—Friday I took her to see the Academy, and we had tea at the Carlton alone. She seemed to grow prettier and prettier, and it made me laugh to watch her pick up some of our jargon. Thursday afternoon Jo was out at tea-time, and she, Lily, was in. I'm not saying I didn't make a fool of myself—I'm not saying what I did was altogether right. But I didn't do anything really wrong, and besides—she encouraged me. She was out, mark you, for a lark, and what's a lark without a flirtation? She took to it as a duck takes to water, too," he added meditatively. "Sometimes I think——" After a pause he went on with briskness. "Well, we had a grand time that evening. I got a box at the Empire, and after supper at the good old Savoy, we went to Jo's place, and the two gurls copied some of the Empire dancing.

"Albert and I didn't go till after three.

"The next afternoon after lunch at Jo's, a wire came for her—for Lily—and the poor little thing's face went like a cream cheese when she read it. Then she handed it to me.

"It was from her husband, ordering her to come home that evening, instead of waiting till Saturday. Jo was furious, and so was I. I'm not saying that she was in love with me, but—I'd kissed her once or twice, and women from the country are like that, poor things! However it was, she cried like anything while Jo was in her room getting into a tea-gown—nobody like Jo for tact, I always say—and I did all I could to console her. Said she must come again soon, and all that. Said I'd write to her, and asked for her picture. *You know, gentlemen.*"

The Gentleman nodded gravely. "Yes," he said, "we know. Go on."

"Then the idea struck me. The village she lived at wasn't more than an hour's run from town, in a good car. We could dine, give her a good blowout, cheer her up a bit, and then the three of us take her home.

"She was delighted. Perfectly delighted.

"We dined at the Troc, and royally, I tell you. The head-waiter there knows me, and knows that I know what's what. It was a bang-up dinner, with lots of the widow, and two mints apiece for each of the gurls. Lily was quite lit up, laughing like anything, as pretty as a picture. She let me hold her hand, under the table, and by George, I must confess I pretty well lost my head! Then, when we had gone back to Jo's for the luggage, Jo had one of her great ideas. She said to me—(thanks, just a drop)—she said, 'Look here, Harold, my head aches and bye-bye seems the place for *la petite Joséphine ce soir*. See? Get rid of Al, and run Lil down

home alone. You can tell her husband—oh, well, one of the things husbands always *are* told.’ The idea appealed to me, as you can imagine, and it did to Lily. Al was all right—first-rate chap, Al, you ought to know him, gentlemen—so I packed the little girl up in the front seat, and her luggage in the tonneau, and off we started.”

The Farmer poked the fire very carefully at this point. The Gentleman, the shabby flask from which he had just replenished the story-teller’s glass on the arm of his chair, said quietly, “Go on,” and the Common Man went on.

“I want you all to understand, gentlemen, that Lily Kingsley was not in love with me. People seeing us together might have thought so, but she wasn’t. Not *exactly*. She was from the country, you must remember, and I suppose I was—well—the first—the first man of the world she had ever met.

“So there wasn’t much harm in my kissing her once or twice after we got clear of the traffic; and as a matter of fact, I don’t quite see how I could have done less.

“So we passed Richmond and were going along very sorry for ourselves because we had to part, when—when it happened.”

He stopped speaking, and said, holding his glass to the silver flask, “A little whisky, please, or—or I can’t go on.”

He drank, and his vulgarity seemed to slip from him as he looked up. His common black eyes were veiled.

“This is why I prefer winter nights to—to beautiful summer ones, gentlemen.

“A tyre burst, we were thrown out, and I—picked her up, stone dead.”

There was a moment’s silence, then he went on.

“Stone dead. And just to my left was the sign-post pointing to the Vicarage. The Vicarage was not only her home: it was the nearest house.”

The Bagman broke the silence. "Whatever did you do?"

"Do?" returned the Common Man, still so curiously unvulgarised. "I took her home to her husband, of course."

After a long pause he resumed. "I left—the—the body in the car at the gate, and went up the path to the open door. As I reached it a man's voice called out—oh, my God! shall I ever forget it—it called, 'Here you are at last, my darling!'

"Then he came into the passage. He was a tall, narrow shouldered man of nearly sixty, and he had a straggly grey beard; one of the thin beards you can see through.

"He stared at me, and then he said, 'I beg your pardon, I thought you were my wife. She is being motored down home by some friends, and I heard your car stop.'"

The Common Man's voice failed for a moment.

"I said," he then resumed, "'Yes—I—I have brought her back——'

"I suppose he saw in my face, for he passed me without a word and went to the car, and a moment later came back, carrying poor little Lily in his arms. Why, my God, gentlemen, I had kissed her not half an hour before!"

After a moment he said with a shrug, "That's all nearly five months ago. Ridiculous that it still always gives me the horrors to talk of it. Well, he laid her down on a horse-hair sofa I could imagine her having hated when she was alive. She was too dead for him to doubt for a moment. He kissed her very quietly, and then he turned to me.

"'Where,' he asked me, 'are the others of your party?'

"We came alone, because Mrs.—because Josephine had a bad head and had to go to bed.

" 'Come here,' he said, taking me by the arm. He led me to a big lamp and took off the shade.

"He didn't say a word. Gentlemen, I give you my word that that old man didn't speak as he looked at me. At me? Good God, he looked clean through me! It seemed hours that we stood there in that glaring light. And if I *had* hurt him—really, you know—for a couple of kisses don't count!—I'd have had to tell him. I'd have blurted it right out.

"But after a while he let me go and went back to her, standing with his hand on her head.

" 'I thank you,' he said, 'for—for bringing my wife home.'

"That's all my story," the Common Man said with a kind of shudder of relief. "That's the end."

The Gentleman rose. "It is a very tragic story," he said, politely, lighting his candle, "and you have told it admirably. Thank you. Good-night."

* * * * *

Fifteen minutes later, as the three others were getting into their beds, the Gentleman, a very shabby dressing-gown drawn closely over his clothes, sat at his table in his bitter cold room, writing rapidly, by the light of two candles, with a stylographic pen.

THE IRON SHUTTER

Miss Izzy and Miss Netty Hobbs came to live at Ker Linda in 1910, when Miss Izzy was sixty and Miss Netty fifty-seven. They had just buried Miss Hobbs, their sister, and they feared life without that determined woman, so that they were glad when the letter came that enabled them to tell their friends, not without a touch of grandeur, that they were retiring to live in the country.

After Miss Hobbs' sudden death there had been a few dreadful days when the old ladies had hardly known how they were to live anywhere, for owing to the masterful Claribel's mismanagement, they found themselves possessed of only about a hundred and twenty pounds a year.

And one cannot live in a villa in Acacia Crescent, Brixton, on that sum.

In the midst of the helpless horror of the two sisters, had come the letter enclosed in one from a strange solicitor.

The enclosure ran as follows—

"My DEAR MISS NETTY,

"Here in Brittany I am about to follow my poor Linda, who died two years ago. And as the dear God has seen fit to leave me childless, and with only one nephew-in-law who has any claim on me, I am leaving my money to him, and to you this house, where I have lived for nearly twenty years.

"I know that you are able to travel if you like, so

come here sometimes, in the summer, and in your old age, the sea will sing to you of your youth and mine, and the days in the spring of 1876—do you remember?

"I never could tell you, because of my faithful Linda waiting for me at home, but surely you knew, Netty. It always seems to me as I sit looking at the sea, that you must have known. Once, only once, I kissed your wonderful hands, and to this day the model I made of them hangs on the wall in the *wohnsimmer*, near the parrot-chintz chair in which a feeble old man so often has dreamed of his youth and you.

"ADOLF WERNER."

Miss Netty had read the letter many times, and her care of her wonderful hands was increased by it, which naturally vexed Miss Izzy. Netty's care for her hands had been absurd while she was young; in her old age it was infuriating.

"But they *are* beautiful," Miss Netty would declare, tranquilly, true to her cult.

And they were. She was a fat, waddling old woman with a wrinkled, too-white face in which the once piquant little nose was squeezed between the fat cheeks. Her shoulders were rounded with fat, her chin hung pendulous on her breast. But her hands were exquisite, and she washed them in oatmeal, in almond meal, soaked them in oils of different kinds, and spent two hours every day in the minutest care for her nails.

Adolf Werner's letter did more than solve the problem of the future existence of the two old women; it warmed Miss Netty's heart with a pallid little glow of romance.

Werner had loved her; she had known it; and the fact that her rather volatile affections had at that time been centred on a wholesale sponge merchant who had never

given her a thought, she now forgot. It seemed to her, as they made their preparations "to go to live in Brittany on an estate left them by a friend" (more proper to say that the estate had been left to them *both*), that she had in losing Adolf Werner, lost the love of her life.

So there was much romance for her in their arrival, one night in October, at the cottage on the shore of the Bay of the Pines. In silence, while Miss Izzy paid the cabman, who looked to the sisters, in his black velvet hat, disconcertingly like an old woman, Miss Netty walked around to the front of the house and up on to the veranda.

In the velvety darkness, her ears filled by the sound of the sea that had sung of her so often to Adolf Werner, her eyes filled with tears; she honestly believed herself to be a blighted woman.

She was not one, for she was too light to be blightable, but she laid her hands solemnly on the railing and enjoyed her grief.

"Seems," interrupted Miss Izzy, coming suddenly out from the room behind her, "that there's more sky here than there is in Brixton!"

Miss Netty did not answer.

"No houses either," pursued the elder sister, glancing round nervously; "not a neighbour!"

"Listen to the sea," suggested Miss Netty.

After a moment of silence they went into the house and explored it. It was very small: upstairs there were two best bedrooms, and that of Rosa, an English-speaking German who had looked after and buried Herr and Frau Werner, and who was, as she rather tactlessly expressed it, willing to do the same for the Misses Hobbs. Downstairs, besides the kitchen and store-room, was only the living-room, in the middle of which stood the dining-table. In one corner there was a brown porcelain stove—

Miss Netty had often heard poor Adolf talk of German stoves and their delightfulness. The pink-washed walls were ornamented with engravings of "Unser Fritz," of the present Kaiser (much more truculent looking in his likenesses than he is in real life, as always); and one or two highly romantic coloured prints.

The curtains at the terrace door were of faded blue stuff, and near the stove stood the parrot-chintz arm-chair.

Miss Netty sat down in it with some ceremony, and crossing her hands, glanced from them to the plaster cast of them hanging under the pipe-rack on her left.

She made up her mind to think very often of poor Werner. . . . When, after a very German supper, the old ladies went to their rooms, Miss Izzy, after a few moments' silence, called Miss Netty. "Netty Hobbs, come here this minute. Just look at this!" Miss Netty, her candle throwing a grotesque shadow of her on the ceiling, went into her sister's room.

Miss Izzy, in her black poplin petticoat and her grey stays, was standing close to the wall by the window, holding up her candle so that its light fell full on a faded photograph that hung there.

"Guthrie!" exclaimed Miss Netty.

"Guthrie."

It was an old-fashioned photograph of a small, slight young man leaning against an extremely ornate Louis XV chair. His face, more pretty than handsome, was turned full towards the observer, but his eyelids drooped, showing abnormally long lashes.

The sisters gazed at it in silence for several seconds, and then Miss Netty said softly, "Poor boy."

Miss Izzy was silent, her bony face grim above the dead yellow of her old neck.

After a pause Miss Netty added, "Izzy—look at his hand!"

The hand in the photograph was carefully arranged on the back of the chair, each finger daintily displayed; it was a beautiful hand.

Half-unconsciously Miss Netty arranged her own in similar fashion on the back of the cheap little chair she had grasped.

"Don't be a fool!" Miss Izzy's voice was sharp. "Guthrie was a bad man, and it was a good day for us when he disappeared. I—I hope—take your hand off that chair, Netty—that he is dead and buried long ago."

Miss Netty, thoroughly snubbed, crept back to bed in silence; she put on her oil-soaked night-gloves, and then lay awake for hours, thinking of her brother.

Their eldest sister and their second, Isadora, "Izzy," had been alike impeccable, and, it seemed to them, dull. But they two, Netty and Guthrie, had clung together. They had loved each other, and she had stood by him in his youthful crimes. They had both been vain of their hands; she remembered his almost as well as, under their gloves, she could, mentally, see her own.

Poor Guth! It was thirty years since he had gone away! She remembered the night when he waked her to tell her that he must either go or be arrested. . . . She had given him all her money; she remembered even the sum: four pounds eighteen.

And since she had closed the house-door on him that night they had heard from him only twice. The first time, four years after his departure, he had wanted money, and their mother had sold her diamond earrings and sent the money to him.

Then there had been a long interim; was it six years, or seven? Miss Netty, lying there in the sound of the waves, could not remember. Probably seven.

At all events their mother was already dead, and Izzy would not hear of helping the prodigal; so she, Netty, had sold some rings and sent—to Australia—the proceeds. He had never thanked her, she remembered.

Poor Guth! Adolf Werner and he had been friends; and Adolf, poor Adolf, had loved her. He had kissed her hands.

She stirred uneasily, half asleep. And then, downstairs, hanging on the wall, was the model he had made of her hands. . . . Her beautiful hands that he had kissed. . . . Miss Netty was asleep.

* * * * *

The next day the old sisters resumed their examination of their new home. The small, crescent-shaped beach held no house beside their own; between them and the high road was a thick forest of pine-trees. Even the nearest farm was three miles away, and the nearest villa nearly five. Plouganec, the town where the railway line ended, was eight miles away. At first, as every evening crept up from the sea, the old sisters were afraid. They were not sufficiently sympathetic to each other to acknowledge their fear; they never voiced it, but the evening always found them together, and in all their lives they had never agreed about anything as they agreed, tacitly, about the iron shutter.

Old Rosa, who was several years younger than Miss Netty, but whom they always called Old Rosa, showed them the shutter the day after their arrival, when they had exclaimed against the absence of windows in their living room.

"There is not windows," the German woman said. "Frau Werner war furchtsam. Burglars, she wass afraid! So Herr Werner makes only one window—dat door."

She pointed to the great door leading to the veranda.

"You see, in daytime, dat iss a very pig door—window—as you like. At night—look here once!"

Seizing an implement rather like a thing to dig potatoes with, the stalwart woman inserted its iron hook into a kind of iron loop in the blind and gave a mighty pull. At first slowly, then with a terrific jarring noise, the corrugated iron blind fell, and in a trice Rosa had fastened it to the floor with two huge bolts.

"*Also!*" she exclaimed in triumph. "No one could get in t'rough dat blind. Ach, it iss heavy. Even my arms makes it to ache."

The little old sisters looked at each other. They were afraid to say what a comfort the thing was to them. But all that winter when Rosa came clumping in, in the sabots she had adopted long ago, Miss Izzy and Miss Netty listened with a feeling of safety to the awful clang with which the blind descended.

The days passed; the weeks; even the months; and the old ladies gradually became used to their isolation.

Miss Izzy was a great letter writer, and twice a week, when the postman came, he carried away a great pile of letters addressed in her prim, old-fashioned handwriting to ladies in Brixton. In return she received many, giving "all the news," over which she gloated eagerly.

Miss Netty, on the contrary, had decided to spend these long winter months in what she called "improving her mind." She began with Carlyle's *French Revolution*, and worked hard at it, although her mind hardly caught its message.

"Very complicated, *I* call it," she said once, to Miss Izzy, "the only part I really enjoy is that about the guillotine. The guillotine is interesting, Izzy."

Miss Izzy, who was reading a letter, nodded. "Both being boys," she returned, "Mr. Gibbons will be as proud as Punch. I'm sending her your love, too, Netty."

"Yes. It was like a great big knife, Izzy; and it was well oiled, so that it just slipped down—*ugh!*—and off went the head. To think of that poor Queen! I declare," she added, "I don't know *what* I'd do if they did it to our own dear Queen."

* * * * *

One day in early March Miss Netty found old Rosa busy with an oil-can, oiling the grooves wherein slid the iron shutter.

"The winter's made it rusty," the servant explained. "I can't 'ardly bring down it."

Miss Netty folded her beautiful hands on her high black bombazine waist. "It reminds me of the French Revolution," she declared.

Then there came, in the late March, a day when everything went wrong at Kerr Linda. The rain had come through the roof and drenched Miss Izzy's cherished eiderdown; Miss Netty had had a very unfresh egg at breakfast; Miss Izzy's breathing was bad; and Miss Netty's new blouse, sent from Brixton, did not fit.

Then at supper they had been given a sweet they particularly disliked; a *compôte* of preserved pears drowned in a kind of custard that tasted of cheese.

"No, thank-you, Rosa," Miss Netty said, turning away.

Miss Izzy did the same.

Rosa set down the dish. "I besser go home to Chermany," she declared. "Dat's an old Hannover rezept. Frau Werner wass very fond of it. I suppose you would like Cooseperry Fool," she added furiously; "all skince and stonce!"

The old sisters looked anxiously at each other. What would become of them there in Brittany if Rosa left?

"I shouldn't like gooseberry fool at all, Rosa," Miss Izzy said, mildly. "I never liked it, and I don't see why you always refer to it."

Rosa expressed by a grunt that she half forgave them, and left the room.

An hour later, when the table was cleared and Miss Izzy was writing, and Miss Netty leaning over her *French Revolution*, Rosa entered.

"I will the blind draw down," she said, taking up the thing that looked like a potato fork.

Miss Netty looked up. "Not quite yet, Rosa, thanks," she said, politely. "My sister's breathing is bad to-night, and the room gets so close without the window open——"

Half an hour later Miss Netty looked up from her book. It really was a warm night. It was low tide, and the sea seemed to be whispering, it was so quiet. The thought of Adolf came into Miss Netty's mind, and, as usual when she thought of him, she folded her hands and looked at them.

Then slowly, irresistibly, something drew her eyes up from her hands, across the lamp-lit floor, across the cement of the terrace, to the railings.

A small, white, evil face was there, looking at her with ugly rats' eyes and a broken-toothed smile.

Miss Izzy was writing placidly; as far as practical things were concerned, Miss Netty was all alone in the world with this vile-looking man. His face changed as he saw her discover him, but for a moment he did not move.

Then two dirty hands crept up, and with an upward lunge he threw himself on the top rail and wriggled over it.

"What do you *want?*?" Miss Netty's voice rang out in a curious shrill way.

"Want?" repeated the man in English. "Hospitality from two compatriots—Miss Hobbs, aren't you?"

Miss Izzy gave one gasp, and, mercifully helped by her weak heart, lost consciousness. For one moment the

man lost sight of Miss Netty as she darted into the shadow. Then she appeared again, her fat body on tip-toe, her arms tense.

"If you come one step nearer," she said, "I'll—I'll kill you."

He laughed. "With that? Stow it! I tell you—I'll explain—I tell you——" He approached slowly, and then, angered by her attitude of menace, more rapidly. "Stop that, I tell you," he cried. "I'll—I'll——"

There was a cry as he slipped and fell, throwing one arm towards her menacingly; then a horrible clangour ending in a dull noise.

* * * * *

When Miss Izzy came to she found Miss Netty kneeling on the floor, close to the iron shutter, which was nearly down. Miss Netty was laughing—laughing in a way that turned Miss Izzy sick.

"Netty," the old woman said, "whatever is the matter?"

Miss Netty laughed.

"Netty—what is the matter? Tell me, in God's name."

So Miss Netty, still laughing, explained, drawing back, so that Miss Izzy could see.

The floor was red with blood, and on the edge of Netty's next-to-best black gown was a man's head, its eyes staring hideously, its tongue hanging out between purple lips.

"It's Guth, Izzy," Miss Netty said. "Guth come back. Only—he wouldn't come in. Only his head," she giggled, "and his hand came in. The rest is—outside."

Miss Izzy died that night, and until daylight old Rosa, who in her suddenly come decrepitude could not move the shutter, sat there with the dead man, the dead woman, and the raving mad woman.

All night Miss Netty—Rosa persuaded her to leave the

man's head covered with a napkin—occupied herself with his hand.

She washed it over and over again; she greased the nails and cut them, and pinked them, until the vagabond's hand was nearly as beautiful as her own.

* * * * *

In the morning poor old Rosa went for help, and the horrible blind was raised.

Of course no one ever knew why Guthrie Hobbs had looked up his sisters; he may have meant to rob them, he may have wanted only to see them at the end of his long, evil life; no one can ever know.

And in a cheap private asylum in Middlesex Miss Netty still cares for her hands and talks to herself about her brother.

Old Rosa has gone back to Germany. The house by the sea is still to let, but no one comes to live in it, and the iron shutter is always down.

TWO APACHES

AT night, the inn of Bon Secours ceased being a low shabby wooden house, with a glass bulge on one side, and became a fairy palace in miniature, with a most magical casement, less a curve of glass than some vast filmy bubble. The other windows became squares and parallelograms of pale gold in the velvety darkness of the low walls.

The night of the fancy-dress dance, the fairy quality of moonlight by the sea added its lustre to the scene, aided by the exquisite absence of electricity.

In the white road before the inn, at about ten o'clock, a man and a woman stood, looking about them in more or less unbroken silence.

The sound of a jangling piano, badly played, added to, by some curious beneficence of imagination, rather than detracted from, what the girl had a moment before called the "magicness of things."

The man, who wore a pierrot costume, was a youth of a certain wistfulness of face. The girl had once said that he looked as though he were missing something he had never had.

She herself was, in her Apache dress, a thing more fiery. Yet at that night hour, as the first glow of the moon reached them over the dunes behind the inn, she too was quiet; her face, under the black kerchief knotted beneath her chin, more subdued than Pierrot remembered to have seen it.

"Are you tired?" he asked, presently.

"No, Leo." After a pause she added, "I wish your name wasn't Leo."

"Why?"

"Because Leo means Lion."

"And I am more like a lamb?" There was an odd kind of sweet bitterness in his voice.

"I didn't mean that—exactly," she returned, slowly. "I couldn't marry a man like a lamb, but—well, you aren't like a lion, are you?"

"No, dearest. Do you wish I were?"

She did not answer for a moment, and when she spoke it was to change the subject.

"It would not have been worth coming over for," she said, vaguely, "if it weren't for—this."

"No. The costumes are pretty awful. I hate Spanish girls, and monks, and quakers, and Britannias."

She nodded. "Leo, when we are married, I want to travel."

"You shall, beloved," he returned, his voice warming. "Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go—somewhere where—don't think me silly—where one can live in the queer atmosphere—there is here to-night."

"I don't understand." His whitened face settled into a look of patience. "How do you mean, dear?"

The dance had stopped, and from the doors poured into the courtyard and into the road the crowd of cheaply costumed people usual at such parties.

A cardinal, whose robes, plainly, had been hastily evolved from the drawing-room curtains of some neighbouring villa, passed, telling a blonde gipsy that *he* called the music jolly rotten. A circus clown and a fat Mephistopheles clamoured loudly for drinks.

"Let's go for a walk," Lord Kintore suggested.

But she refused. "No. They said that some one was going to play the violin."

"It'll be bad."

"Probably. Still, it might be good, and if it were—here——" She broke off dreamily.

They walked through the courtyard and up the path leading to the dunes, his young face set in troubled lines.

She had only a fortnight ago promised to marry him, and he had loved her for years, yet he was not happy.

He felt vaguely, in the inexpressive way of four-and-twenty, that he did not know the real Ursula.

This, he realised, was in no way her fault. She was frankness and sincerity themselves, but she was also *her*-self, and he could not reach her.

Sometimes he wondered if it was because he was a full-blooded Englishman, and she half Irish and half French.

He loved her brilliant darkness, her alternating vividness and dreaminess, for they were her, but he lamented his own dullness in being unable to understand.

He was too young to trust to time, as an older man might have done; too modest to believe that his own charms were of the kind to change her nature in a way that might eventually make her more comprehensible to him; indeed, his loyal love would not have changed her, for he loved her as she was.

Still, he sighed as they stood at the crest of the dunes and watched the sea, across which lay a strip of flaky moonlight, iridescent and broken, as if it were a trail of floating fish-scales.

"Poor Leo," she said, gently, as a mother might have spoken.

He laughed. "I am a dull dog, dear," he answered; "sometimes I forget it, but to-night is one of the times I remember."

"No, you are not dull. You're—you are just my dear Leo," she said, calmly affectionate.

This encouraged him to grope in his mind, to try to tabulate his trouble.

"Ursula, do you feel quite happy?" he asked, shyly.

For a long moment she was silent, and he watched her standing motionless in the dark rough clothes she had had made for her personification of an Apache. More than the others she looked her part; her dark, strong face held, he saw, capabilities of a fierceness he could never know, and there was in it no delicacy of breeding to give the lie to her costume. Her grandfather had been an Irish veterinary surgeon in Dublin, and her mother's mother a mannequin in a big shop. She herself was in every way worthy to be Lady Kintore, he knew, but he recognised as matter-of-factly as she herself that she was not of good birth.

Perhaps, he reflected, that was why she looked so perfectly the part of a Parisian hooligan!

Then she spoke. "No, Leo, I don't think I am quite happy. I ought to be. I, Ursula Farrell, a penniless failure as a governess, marrying you—a peer of the realm, and—the best and dearest boy in the world! But—you aren't happy either, so there's no harm in my telling you. There is something wanting, isn't there?"

"Yes; though it is no lack of love on my part that is the cause. Ursula, I do adore you——"

"And I love you. Leo. Only—why am I, an Irish Frenchwoman, so calm about it? Why am I not in raptures? Why do I feel so—quiet?"

The poor boy dared not tell her the truth as he knew it.

"I will do everything on earth for you," he said, hurriedly. "Everything you want you shall have. Thank God, I have plenty of money."

"Yes. Better still, thank God you are—you, dear. When I think how only a month ago Mrs. Carteret was treating me, and—now! And it *was* good of you to

make Lady Eva bring me over to France. She is very kind, though naturally she doesn't want you to marry me. Why should she?" She laughed. "And I am a worm, Leo—I do love the big hotel, and the luxury, and—best of all, I love my pearls!"

Pushing aside the kerchief she wore, she drew out a string of large pearls and fingered them delicately.

"I love them because they were your mother's, but—also because they are so—valuable!"

"Ursula!" There was pain in his voice, and he went on hurriedly, "You mean because they are beautiful."

But she frowned, "Because they are beautiful, but also—yes—because they are valuable."

"All right, dear. Have it your way. Only, put them back under the handkerchief; they look out of place on an Apache!"

She obeyed, laughing, as they turned to walk back to the inn.

"They might have been stolen for me by Riquet-à-la-Houppé, or Georges Sans-Doigts," she declared. "He might have strangled a duchess in her dressing-room and stripped them off her neck."

"Whereas in reality my great grandfather, when a younger son, bought them out of his prize-money as a naval captain! Hark!" He stopped, and held up his hand. "Some one is playing the violin."

From the open windows came the sound of a fiddle played by an artist.

The two young people stood still to listen, the girl's hand on her breast, her dark eyes dilated.

Kintore saw that she had forgotten him, that she was again in the fairyland into which he could not follow her.

As they stood there, a clock in the village struck half-past eleven.

It was a half-hour's drive back to the big place at which they were staying, and Lady Eva Grey, his cousin, was nervous. It was time they started.

"Ursula, I'll go and look for Jarvis—we ought to start."

She nodded absently, raising her hand to silence him, and after a second's hesitation he left her at the foot of the path and turned off into the courtyard.

For two or three minutes she stood still, and then, at last, went down the slope into the little back garden.

It was nearly deserted, the small place; two maid-servants were giggling together on a bench, and near the open window stood two men in fancy costume, listening to the music. Ursula, too, listened, the maids not heeding her; in her rough clothes she looked like one of the fishergirls of the village.

The music was exquisitely beautiful, and presently the girl walked quietly to the window where the two men stood. One was dressed in the garb of a comic-opera Neapolitan; the other, she noticed with some amusement, appeared to be what she herself was, an Apache. He was a very handsome man, with well-cut lips just parted as he listened to the music over teeth of milky whiteness. His square chin was outlined against the crimson cotton handkerchief he wore as a tie. His costume, she saw, was very well thought out, his dark hair being brushed into an oily curve on his brow, and his cloth cap really looked battered and old.

The girl, drawn to the man by some feeling that she did not attempt to analyse, and transported by the music into the fairy world she could not open to her lover, unconsciously stared at the Apache.

Suddenly he raised his eyes and met hers. She felt a furious flush sweep over her, and a curious expression

flashed into his eyes. He was, she thought, subconsciously, not quite a gentleman, but——

To her horror he quietly left his companion and approached her. He did not speak, but continued to look at her with frank, gluttonous admiration.

"*Eh bien?*" he said, after a long pause.

"You must have thought me very rude," she stammered. "I—your costume is so good—I quite forgot that you must notice me staring at it."

He laughed, deep dimples adding their charm to his face.

"I see—yes, it is not bad. And yours is good, too—I suppose you are——"

"An Apache," she interrupted nervously. "Of course I am a real one—I got it out of *Les Apaches de Paris*."

He nodded. "So did I mine! You have made one mistake, though."

Her courage, never long absent, was returning, and she felt strangely at ease.

"Yes, Apache girls in Paris don't wear pearls."

She laughed. "Not even if—some murderous charmer gives them to them?"

"Murderous charmers, no doubt, would give pearls to the women they love," he returned, gravely, looking at his watch, which, she noticed, was a very handsome gold one, although he wore it, owing to the exigencies of his rôle, chainless, and in his trousers pocket.

"Unfortunately for them, however," he went on, "people with pearls seem to prefer to keep them. Iron safes are enemies to the trinket-loving demoiselles Apaches, I fear. But hush," he added suddenly; "the music——"

The music, in fact, had begun again, and this time to a skilful accompaniment that nearly obscured the deficiencies of the piano; the violinist was playing a waltz.

In waltzing itself there is nothing essentially romantic,

but, as every one knows, no music in the world is so sensuous, so imagination stirring, as waltz music. And this was one of the deadliest of its species.

Under its influence old Frenchmen, bald and paunchy, dreamt of forgotten hours, forsaken loves; and grandmothers, even one arrayed that evening as Manon Lescaut, found themselves re-living hours further back in the last century than they would allow their birthdays to have been.

Ursula and the Apache stood side by side, the girl's heart beating fast, her lips trembling, the man's dark eyes fixed dreamily on her face, as she knew, though she dared not meet them.

On and on went the waltz, and finally the man spoke.

"Mademoiselle, I must go—this is no place for me. I am only a poor devil of a painter. Good-bye."

She raised her hand.

"No—wait a moment."

He took her hand in the half-darkness, and kissed it. His lips were smooth and strong.

"If things were a little different," he muttered; and as he moved she saw that his brow under his peaked cap was damp with drops of sweat.

"I—I—good-bye," she said, leaving her hand in his.

At that moment she heard Kintore's voice, calling her.

The enormity of her conduct came to her with a force only less vivid than the strength of the feeling that was mastering her.

"What is your name?" she asked, hardly knowing her voice to be her own.

"My name? Oh, I am Alain Raté; and you—you are Fanfan Minuit, with your black eyes. Come, say good-bye to me."

He drew her gently into the shadow, towards the scrub oaks at the foot of the slope.

She knew, as drowning people are said to know things in a flash of crystal certainty, that the best of her belonged to Leo Kintore, and that what drew her to this stranger was the unworthiest in her nature.

"I—it is just because he isn't a gentleman," she told herself, "it is just because I am not really a lady—and he won't even tell me his name; yet if he held up his hand, I'd marry him to-morrow—and yet, it isn't love——"

"Ursula? Where are you, Ursula?"

Kintore's voice, as she and the stranger reached the solitude of the slope behind the stables, seemed to be miles away.

The girl, out of breath, turned and faced her companion.

"I must go," she said; "this is—nonsense. *What is the matter?*"

For he had burst into a brutal laugh, and caught both her hands in his.

"The matter? Nothing. Only I want those pearls. Unfasten them." As she did not move, he shook her violently. "Unfasten them, I tell you—they are very good ones—and as I happen to have a girl in Paris who likes pearls, I'll give them to her!"

Without a word she unclasped the necklace and gave it to him.

"So you thought I was a gentleman in disguise! *Eh bien*, so they think in Paris. *Eh bien, Mademoiselle, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer.*"

With a jeering laugh he left her, sauntering back through the garden with, she felt, a cynical recognition of her inability to raise a hue and cry against him. He knew, she felt dully, that she could not say a word.

Slowly she followed him, her kerchief pinned close against her throat.

In the middle of the garden she met Kintore.

"My dear, where have you been?"

"Nowhere, Leo."

They found, and said good-night to, their hostess, and five minutes later were speeding towards their own town.

"You look tired, dearest," he said, taking her hand.

"Leo—yes, I am tired," she returned. "Do you mind if I don't talk?"

Through the waning moonlight the motor flew.

The young man leaned back in his corner, watching—watching the girl.

And she, sick with horror, face to face with that in her nature that had led her so far towards dishonouring the gentleman by her side, asked herself wearily, over and over again, "How shall I tell him?"

THE PRINCIPINO

HAYCOCK PLACE, a small square through which there is no thoroughfare and in which is situated Mrs. Pentecost's private hotel, is within a stone's throw of the Euston Road. No. 3 is on the left as one goes under the archway that leads from the noisy street, and is in no way distinguished from its neighbours, except for the group of three brilliant, very flourishing, red geraniums in the area window. These geraniums belong to Annie, the cook, and do not materially affect the mental atmosphere of the house. Opposite the house is a blank wall, on the other side of which some grim, scrawny old trees deploy their angular charms.

At the far end of the little place is a pickle factory, and thus it is that there seems, about dinner-time, to hang like a cloud over Haycock Place the curiously British smell of boiled mutton, sharpened by the tang of hot vinegar.

The first thing the Principino noticed that famous evening of his arrival was that everybody in the place must be having mutton for dinner, and probably they were; and the subtle accompanying odour of cabbage, the national vegetable, was also at once noted. Every country has its own distinguishing smell, and there is no doubt that the combined aromas of mutton and cabbage ought to be as deeply cherished in the memories of exiled Britons as that of garlic is to the Spaniards.

It was seven o'clock on a November evening, and Mrs. Pentecost's boarders—or, as she preferred to call them, guests—were sitting at dinner in the long, thin, slice of

a dining-room, on the left of the house door. Mrs. Pentecost herself, a large glossy pink woman, of course sat at the head of the table. On her right, Mr. Horace Brown, an elderly gentleman, vaguely known to be "something in the City," on her left, Mr. Piom-Bino, the "Piom-Bino" whom every patron of the second-rate London music-halls has seen in his really wonderful juggling turn. A handsome, cheery-looking man this, with a big silky moustache curling upwards towards his eyes, much in the way that the ram wears his horns. Mrs. Piom-Bino, elderly, leathern, bad-tempered-looking, bore writ large all over her the desolating fact that she had been married for her money.

In all there were seven boarders, or guests, but only two of these need be mentioned: Mrs. Reeder and little Mrs. Quince. Mrs. Reeder was a large, almost handsome woman, whose originally fresh complexion was becoming a little patchy, and whose frizzed autumn-leaf-coloured front, worn in the manner dear to the ladies of the royal family, didn't match her black hair. She wore a heavy black silk gown trimmed with pale blue, and she had a very handsome watch chain, and a large locket on another chain, and big diamond earrings. Little Mrs. Quince often wondered why ladies with large red, beefy-looking ears always wore diamonds in them. Mrs. Quince herself had no diamonds; she was very small, very sallow, and her delicate little face, with the curiously fine features that so often belong to quite common American women, had lost everything but the pathetic memory of what once upon a time might have been real beauty. Her hair, however, pepper and salt and uninteresting, really grew on her head, and was beautifully brushed and cared for.

At the moment when this tale actually begins Mrs. Quince was tearing her tough mutton apart with her

knife and fork, her thin little claws of hands trembling violently. Never a week passed at Mrs. Pentecost's private hotel for refined ladies and gentlemen without a battle between the effulgent Mrs. Reeder and the lonely, poor, timid little American widow, and to-night's battle was just over.

"Some people," Mrs. Reeder announced, with a valedictory wave of the hand, "would do better if they didn't make statements that they can't prove."

"But I can prove it," burst out Mrs. Quince; "I described it all to you. I've showed you her letters and my photographs of the villa."

"Humph!" says Mrs. Reeder. "I'll thank ye for some more mutton, with a bit o' fat."

Mr. Piom-Bino, who was a good-natured man, set down the vinegar cruet with a little bang. "Ladies, ladies!" he said, with a conquering twist of his moustache. "Live and let live."

"I am sure——" began little Mrs. Quince, with a dreadful tremor in her poor voice, but he hurried on—"Of course you are; we all know, Mrs. Quince, that you never doubt anything any other lady may happen to say."

Mrs. Reeder gave vent to a little noise that could only be described as resembling the distant trumpeting of an agitated elephant. "I'd thank any lady to doubt my word," she pronounced, balefully. "*Me*, that had me house in the best part of Brixton, and me own carriage and three servants."

Mr. Brown, a silent man, hid his mouth for a moment with what they would all have called his serviette. He knew perfectly well that Mrs. Reeder was what might be termed the star boarder of the establishment, that she was looking for a second husband, and he realised that her little red, aged, fat-embedded eye was occasionally turned on himself. He was a shy man with a pas-

sion for chess, and a hardly less strong one for historical novels of the swashbuckling period, but he was not afraid of Mrs. Reeder, for he was strong in the knowledge that—in the interests of self-preservation—he had the courage to be ruthless, and even downright rude.

"Has Mrs. Quince," he asked in his rather pleasant voice, leaning forward and smiling at Mrs. Reeder, "has Mrs. Quince ever seen Ellengowan Villa?"

Mrs. Reeder's face turned more red in its redder portions. "She has not," she answered, her mouth not quite so free of obstruction as might have been wished. "In me poor husband's day, I was not living in a boarding house."

"Private hotel," burst out protestingly from several pairs of lips, with shocked glances at Mrs. Pentecost.

"Exactly," pursued Mr. Brown, quietly. "I only meant that if Mrs. Quince is willing to believe all *you* tell her about Ellengowan Villa, I really don't see, my dear Mrs. Reeder, why you can't believe—I am sure *I* do—what she tells us about her daughter."

Mrs. Quince clasped her thin hands and leaned towards him across the table. "Thank-you, Mr. Brown," she said; "you are always very kind to me; you might even be an American."

Before the embarrassed gentleman could answer this compliment Mrs. Reeder got in a neat blow. "I take it," she said grandly, twirling the various rings on her fat red fingers, "that I look like a lady who might have a villa in the best part of Brixton." After a murmur of assent from her audience she added, pointing at Mrs. Quince, her cruel little eyes shining with delighted malice, "And does Mrs. Quince look like the mother of a Princess—I ask you?"

Mrs. Quince burst into tears, pushing back her plate, rose and stumbled from the room. There was a mo-

ment's silence. Every one at the table except Mrs. Reeder was embarrassed, and Mr. Horace Brown was more than embarrassed, he was angry. Drawing himself up very straight in his chair, he said hotly, "No man on earth could have said that." Then he, too, rose and left the room, closing the door with something almost like a bang.

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Mrs. Quince had fled up the dark stairs, and as the little gentleman followed her the dust that her hurrying feet had raised from the thick carpet tickled his nose and made him sneeze. He found the poor little woman sitting in her rocking-chair, rocking like mad and chewing gum to console herself. When he knocked, she knew at once who it must be, and bade him come in; for her room was one of those known to all hard-up dwellers in the tents of others as a bed-sitting-room; that is, there was a bamboo and paper screen round the bed, and another smaller one hid the simple mysteries of Mrs. Quince's toilet. The dressing-table, being supposedly a more respectable piece of furniture than the washing-stand, was exposed to view, and Mr. Brown noticed—as he had noticed before with profound approval—the beautiful polish on the simple silver brushes and boxes, and the spotless cover of the pin-cushion. In a large and expensive silver frame was a photograph of a young girl. To this photograph Mrs. Quince's hand made a fluttering sign, as Mr. Brown sat down.

"I can't see why she can't believe me," she burst out, "with the Princess's photograph there on my table, as large as life."

"I suppose you have had no recent news of Her Highness?" the little man asked, by way of drawing her mind away from the recent battle.

She shook her head sadly. "Not really, you know," she said. "I told *them* I had. She is very busy, you see; these Roman nobles live in a perfect whirl, and what with her son—they call him the Principino—of course she hasn't really any time; besides, she never was much of a hand at the pen, Carrie wasn't."

He nodded. They had both lived in the house nearly two years, and they had always been friendly towards each other, and he knew more about the lonely little woman than any one else. "She must be very like you," he observed after a pause, going to the dressing-table and taking up the photograph.

Mrs. Quince nodded without emotion. "Yes, I was a real pretty girl once. Carrie was as like me as two peas, only she had her father's temper—his temper was something fierce, Mr. Quince's was. I just wish he was here," she added, with sudden venom, "when Mrs. Reeder talks to me like that."

"So do I," agreed Mr. Brown, fervently; "however, I was going to ask you, Mrs. Quince, if you couldn't just make up your mind never to answer her. If I were you I would never mention the Princess or the Principino, or anything about 'em. You see, she's jealous, Mrs. Reeder is; she knows perfectly well it's all true, and she's jealous."

Mrs. Quince looked at him wistfully. Her eyes, which were of that singularly pale blue that looks uninteresting at a distance, but has a curious fascination when seen at close range, filled with sudden tears. "I don't know," she moaned; "perhaps she *don't* believe it. It's perfectly true I don't look like the mother of a Princess. Perhaps nobody believes it. Perhaps—why, Mr. Brown"—rising suddenly, she approached him, her tiny body shaking with nerves—"perhaps *you* don't believe it!"

He drew back, almost horrified by the force of her

anguish. He was horribly embarrassed, for he never had believed the story, and wouldn't have told her so for the world. In his gentle, middle-aged breast there beat a heart always capable of a throb for a woman in distress, and, nourished on the wildest type of romantic fiction, full of kind and faded chivalry. So he lied like a man, and like a woman she knew that he lied. After faintly protesting that his lie had been the whitest of truths, Mr. Brown beat a retreat, to smoke the pipe of repentance in his more comfortable, lower down room.

* * * * *

It was still early, and a few minutes later little Mrs. Quince, attired in her shabby sealskin jacket and a pathetic picture that enriched with oft-curved ostrich feathers, crept quietly downstairs. She was going to take a walk and try to amuse herself with looking into shop windows. She went noiselessly past the dining-room door, behind which guests were engaged in refusing the withered apples and pigmy oranges that Mrs. Pentecost called dessert, and opened the hall door. It was late November, and there was a fog, and more than ever the little square reeked of mutton and cabbage and vinegar. The sky was quite invisible, and the pavement under the solitary light that starred the darkness was black and greasy—it was a dreadful night, but anything was better than sitting in her room, staring at the photograph of her discredited Princess. Mrs. Quince picked up her skirts with a gesture of old-fashioned elegance and trotted down the steps. At the foot of them she tripped and nearly fell into the arms of a slight young man who was on the point of mounting them.

"Per Bacco!" exclaimed the young man, while the little lady murmured excuses. She had dropped her hand-bag, and it had opened in the fall; its contents lay in the yellow murk at their feet. The young man lit a

match with much agility and quickness, and picked up the letters, the key, the shabby little purse, and one or two other little articles, and put them back with care.

"Seems quite pleasant," Mrs. Quince observed, with a shy little air of being a travelled person, "to hear a gentleman swearing in Italian."

The young man laughed. "The Signora speaks Italian?" he asked.

"Oh, no—that is to say, only a very little; but my daughter lives in Italy—in Rome. Her husband," she added, with dignity, "is Prince Giulio Savarelli."

Once more the young man ejaculated "Per Bacco!" but this time in a voice of such amazement that Mrs. Quince stood still in the lamplight and stared up at him. She had not to look up very far, for, tiny though she was, the young man topped her by barely a couple of inches. He was very young, she saw, and very handsome, with velvety cheeks of that golden brown just flushed with rose that only Italians seem able to achieve. Absurdly large eyes, fringed like bulrush-fringed lakes, gazing at her with such surprise that she gasped out—

"What is the matter? Why do you look like that?"

"Because," the young man answered, "you must be Signora Queence, mother of the Signora Principessa."

This sudden recognition, following so closely on the disaster of the dinner-table, was almost too much for the little lady.

"Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands in the way that Mr. Brown thought so touching, and Mrs. Reeder and Mrs. Piom-Bino so ridiculously affected; "then you believe it—you do believe it! Mercy sakes—what a comfort you are."

At this, naturally enough, the beautiful youth was much surprised. "Believe it. Believe what?" he returned, unbuttoning his coat. "I do not understand what

you mean, but I have a letter for you from the Signora Principessa."

Mrs. Quince's heart gave a wild leap. If only for once Carrie had written on coroneted paper, or even on paper with the address of the palace embossed on it! But no; the letter consisted of one sheet of plain note-paper, and was signed simply "Carrie." The young man, who was full of the delightful, innocent curiosity about other people incident to his age, lit a cigarette and watched this odd, obviously mad old lady as she read her letter. Knowing its contents as he did, his amazement was great, when Mrs. Quince's eyes filled with tears and she turned to him with a despairing little shrug.

"It's no good," she moaned; "it's just like all the others; they'll never believe it."

They walked slowly away back under the archway into the comparative bustle of the mean street, and because he was really and truly interested, his lively young sense of romance full of response, because she was utterly alone, and even the faithful Brown doubted her, she burst out and told him the whole story.

"But why do you care?" he interrupted once to say. "Five hundred lire is five hundred lire. If I had five hundred lire I shouldn't care if they said I had never had a mother and father."

"Well, you don't understand. It's dreadful for me; that old elephant of a woman is always after me, and now," she gave a little hard sob, "even Mr. Brown doesn't believe it."

The youth was more or less of a rascal; he was a person without much principle; he had a gay and irresponsible love of mischief, that, only twenty though he was, had already got him into manifold scrapes, but he was a warm-hearted affectionate boy, and he had, in

Italy, a little mother whom he adored. He was exceedingly sorry for the mother of his employer's wife, so he drew her hand kindly through his arm, and hailing a taxi, took her to a little Italian restaurant, for she owned up to being hungry, and he was famishing. For more than an hour this strangely matched couple sat in their corner eating and talking. They had macaroni, they had beefsteak, to which the youth displayed an astounding devotion, they had salad reeking with garlic. The young man, whose name it appears was Aurelio, devoured pounds of bread, using it in the economical way of Italians of his class as a mop to gather up every scrap of food and glimmer of fat from his plate. They drank Chianti out of thick bubbly glasses, and the whole meal was topped off with hot fluffy custard with rum in it. Who it was that suggested The Plan, neither of them could ever remember, but suggested it was, and helped by the good food and wine it grew and shaped itself with almost ridiculous ease. It was a delight to little Mrs. Quince to hear the boy shout with laughter, for he had a way of throwing back his head and showing all his impeccable teeth, that seemed to her the very embodiment of youthful joy and life, and he, on his part, was honestly touched and pleased to see the poor little faded lady revive and even mildly flourish under the influence of the great idea.

At about nine they left the restaurant and made their way back towards Euston. "Be at the restaurant sharp at half-past twelve," the young man said as they parted. "I'll have the money and will settle all the details. Oh, Santo Dio!" he added, roaring with laughter, "what a glorious time we shall have!" Then, still twinkling audaciously, he took off his hat, and without apologising, kissed his astounded new friend. "Good-night," he

called, disappearing into the gloom. "Good-night, *Grandmamma!*"

* * * * *

For several days after her meeting with Aurelio Ruffo, little Mrs. Quince lived her usual quiet life, showing no difference in her manner, kindly polite, nervously shy, rather like, as Mr. Brown thought, a poor little tame squirrel. It was a fortunate circumstance for her that at this time the splendid Mrs. Reeder paid her annual visit to a niece in West Hampstead. The magnificence and glory of living in West Hampstead was something to which only Mrs. Reeder could give just expression, but as she left Haycock Place for these supernal heights the next day but one after the arrival of the Princess's letter, it was only during one dinner hour that Mrs. Quince was obliged to listen to her explanations of bliss.

"Everything very elegant, they 'ave, with a conservatory, and 'busses at the end of the road; but, of course, we never use the 'busses; we use the motor-car. Mr. Hebble-Hubbard, being a stockbroker, o' course has everything of the very best. I declare," the large lady went on, picking her teeth with gentility, "it will quite take me back to Ellengowan Villa."

Mr. Brown, who, according to his wont, was eating his dinner in almost perfect silence, leaned forward at this familiar name, and chancing as he did so to catch Mrs. Quince's eye he was amazed to see in that pale blue orb something more like a gleam of humour than he had ever beheld in it. Mrs. Reeder had also apparently observed this unfamiliar expression, and gave a mild trumpet as if about to speak, and then thought better of it. For naturally it was impossible that little Mrs. Quince could smile at a suggestion of Ellengowan Villa.

"How long shall you be away?" Mrs. Quince asked quietly, using her knife and fork in the curiously minc-

ing manner of American women of her age and class.

"I shall be back on Thursday; they urged me to stay for Christmas," Mrs. Reeder replied, "but they'll have the house full. They are giving a dance Christmas Eve; but I've never been to a dance since my poor Reeder died, so I declined."

Dinner was almost over. Mrs. Piom-Bino had announced that she and her husband had also, after declining many pressing invitations, decided to grace Mrs. Pentecost's hospitable mansion during the holidays; and Mr. Brown, in answer to a direct question from Mrs. Pentecost, had answered gravely, that he, too, was staying in town, and looking forward to a little rest.

Mrs. Pentecost, who was a generous, cheery soul, one's usual prejudices against landladies to the contrary notwithstanding, rose and smiled at her guests. "I've got two turkeys coming from Ireland," she stated, "and my sister-in-law has promised to give me the best roast of beef in Devonshire for Christmas Day. We'll have a jolly little family party."

In the warmth and friendliness of mind, engendered by these prognostications, every one had already turned to the door, when Mrs. Quince made her astounding revelation.

"It will be lovely," she announced, straightening the bow of lace at her throat with gently curled little fingers. "I am so glad you are all going to be here, for my grandson is arriving on Tuesday."

"Your grandson!" most of the ladies and gentlemen repeated these words in their surprise. But it was Mrs. Reeder's voice that carried best, and it was to Mrs. Reeder that Mrs. Quince replied:

"Yes, I've never spoken to you of my grandson, Giulio Savarelli."

There was a hush that contained probably the most

satisfactory minute of all little Jessie Quince's life. To Mr. Brown's mind there was something quite dramatically beautiful in the sight of the little woman trying so hard not to look vulgarly triumphant at this new crisis. There were two small apricot coloured flames in her thin cheeks, and her hands with the carefully pointed and polished nails, still smoothing the lace bow, trembled violently, but Mrs. Quince's head, held well up in the American way, was proud only in its carriage; her eyes were dropped, and a look of extreme self-depreciation was on her face. Good Mrs. Pentecost burst out into raptures. She was delighted.

"How nice for Mrs. Quince. Was he Her Highness, the Princess's, little boy? She must fix up a nice room for him. The pink room on the third floor would be the best, because the chimney never smoked there, and she knew that Italians needed the light and heat. For her part she had always felt sorry for organ-grinders."

The polite Piom-Bino had opened the dining-room door with his usual grand air, and Mrs. Reeder rounded the end of the table and led the way out; but on the threshold she paused, for the incredible Mrs. Quince was making another world-shaking statement.

"Yes, it is the Princess's son," she observed majestically. "But he is not a little boy, Mrs. Pentecost, and you needn't bother about the pink room, for he is going to stay at the Ritz."

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Twenty pounds is a large, a very large, sum of money, but still it does not last for ever, and in view of the great campaign ahead of her, Mrs. Quince supplemented it by doing something to which throughout all her pathetic vicissitudes, she had hitherto never stooped. She sold some of the cherished little bits of jewellery that she always kept guarded under lock and key in a mother-of-

pearl box with Santa Barbara on the lid; her grandmother's garnet earrings were sacrificed, the little old ring with a diamond embedded in the twist of gold, and the curious old-fashioned set of Roman mosaics, including bracelet, earrings, and a brooch as large as a hot-cross bun. This remarkably hideous parure bore on its immense surfaces brilliant representations of St. Peter's, the Coliseum, the fountain of Trevi, Trajan's Column, and other monumental beauties of Rome. Mrs. Quince considered them the most beautiful pieces of jewellery in the world, and they were, moreover, heirlooms, for her father had bought them for her mother sixty years before. There was, however, no help for it. If the Great Plan was to be carried out, her wounded pride healed for ever, and her position in the boarding-house consolidated and elevated, she *must* have money. And it is perhaps not so strange as at first sight it may appear, that by the time Aurelio brought back the money for the "Roman set," the little lady, in her interest and growing fondness for the attractive and spontaneous boy, had almost lost sight of the fact that The Plan was, after all, what she herself would have called a fake. She nearly believed, as the young Roman clerk kissed her hand in his pretty way, that he *was* her grandson.

As for Aurelio, he was thoroughly enjoying himself, and his admiration for her stroke of genius in what she called "locating him at the Ritz" was unbounded.

"Oh, bravo! bravo!" he cried, throwing a kiss towards the ceiling with one hand while he rolled a cigarette with the other. "They'll burst with envy, these old beasts of yours."

Mrs. Quince was silent for a moment. She was not chewing gum, because she had discovered that Aurelio regarded that soothing custom not with dislike, but with naïve and unbridled amusement.

"It is dreadful to tell so many falsehoods," she said. "I suppose I shall be punished for it some day, but you don't know how they've tormented me. Even Mrs. Pentecost never believed me. Piom-Bino was polite, but even he never pretended to."

Aurelio pricked up his ears.

"Piom-Bino! That is an Italian name."

"Yes, but he isn't an Italian, and that wife of his is so ugly tempered, I don't mind telling her lies." After a pause she added, wistfully, "but I'm sorry about Mr. Brown."

Aurelio's ears, which were really slightly faun-like in shape, pricked up still further under his glossy chestnut curls.

"Who's Mr. Brown?" he asked, inquisitively.

"He is the gentleman who was here before I came—something in the City. I am sure he has a lovely nature," she sighed, "but—but he doesn't believe me either."

"But he will when I have done with him," laughed the young man with a vague gesture. He spoke good English, for Prince Savarelli's banking house was a very important one, with English and American affiliations, and the boy had been given special facilities for learning the language so useful to the business: he had, Mrs. Quince knew, been in London twice before on errands connected with the bank.

The Princess Savarelli was the wife of a very rich man, but she was not generous and had never before sent her mother more than twenty-five dollars at Christmas. It was plain that Aurelio, although young, had all of the shrewd insight of his race, and didn't like the Signora Principessa; he didn't like the Signore Principe, and he loathed the Principino, who was two years younger than himself, and who apparently displayed all the arrogance of high placed people half of whose blood is inferior.

But for several years Aurelio had been about the old palace in the Street of the Fountains: first, he quite cheerfully informed his new patron, as a page, then, after his promotion to the bank on the discovery of his quick wits and eel-like qualities, as a kind of unofficial messenger between the late-rising, chocolate-sipping, indolent prince, and his busy energetic cousin, Don Paolo, who was his partner, and the brains of the whole business.

"She is beautiful, the Signora Principessa, oh yes, beautiful!" the young man explained, with the unconscious cynicism that in Italians so frequently goes hand-in-hand with real warm-heartedness and kindness, "particularly now since her hair is fair, but," he added with a shrewd glance at Mrs. Quince, "her mouth is not so good as yours; thin, you know—too thin."

Mrs. Quince sighed. "There was always a hard streak in her," she returned, a little wearily. After a minute she put the question to him that for days she had been keeping back. "Does she ever mention me? I mean to little Giulio, the Principino?"

"No," answered Aurelio, carefully staring out of the window.

"But when she gave the money to you, and told you to look me up. What did she say? She must have said something."

And Aurelio lied, as any decent man would have done in his place: "She sent you her dear salutes, and said she was sorry she could not invite you to Rome."

"Well, that, of course," Mrs. Quince answered calmly, "always was impossible. You see, the Prince made that a condition: he wouldn't have married her unless she promised not to see me."

Aurelio's exclamation was sonorous and musical, but it was not polite. He was exceedingly sorry for the faded little lady whose daughter had made such a splen-

did marriage, and ruthless as he could be on occasion, wild horses couldn't have torn from him the fact that her grandson had all his life been taught that she was dead. They became real friends, this singular couple, during the few days that elapsed between their meeting and the evening when he arrived in full panoply at Haycock Place. They had chosen this evening because it was the day of the arrival home of the great Mrs. Reeder, and without her presence much savour would have been lacking to the situation.

Fully instructed, Mrs. Quince came down to dinner, that night, a little late. Mrs. Reeder, whom her entrance interrupted in the midst of the vivid description of her visit to West Hampstead, scowled angrily as the little lady slipped in, and she scowled still more fiercely when the pleasant Piom-Bino exclaimed kindly—

"What a beautiful gown, Mrs. Quince!"

Mrs. Quince, indeed, was mildly resplendent in a soft grey cashmere gown, embellished with a square shawl of very good black lace, and no one but she could know that the gown had been made over for a small sum from a relic of her former days, and that the shawl had been obtained almost at the sword's point as a loan by the ingenious Aurelio, from a shop-keeping friend of his.

Mrs. Quince bowed. "I am glad you like it," she said, with the intense dignity that large women never can achieve. "It is nothing, but as my grandson is coming I thought I would put it on." And even Mrs. Reeder wondered irritably how many other handsome, if rather old-fashioned, garments that hateful little woman had been keeping concealed from the collective boarding-house eye.

It being Christmas Eve all the guests had risen to sartorial heights unusual to them. Mrs. Reeder seemed

to have burst out all over in an irruption of beads, and wore all her gold chains. Mrs. Pentecost wore her famous amethyst moiré, and even little Mrs. Piom-Bino was, so to speak, new down to the waist, wearing as she did her usual evening dark-blue skirt and a brand-new silk blouse of a peculiarly livid raspberry. The table, too, was decorated and looked very attractive, with bunches of chrysanthemums, and every scrap of silver or nickel that the good landlady possessed. Amy and Kate, the two maids, bribed into the wearing for that occasion only, of caps, had just set the two turkeys down, one in front of Mrs. Pentecost, and the other before Mr. Piom-Bino, when a loud ring at the door startled the company. Everybody was silent, for everybody realised that this must be the hitherto, unbelieving Principino.

For reasons of his own, Aurelio had decided to speak with a strong Italian accent, but this circumstance, while in one way rather confusing the guests, in another way put them at their ease. It comforted Mrs. Reeder, for example, that the young man spoke such bad English, and when at last he was seated at the foot of the table, with Mrs. Quince on his right and Mrs. Reeder on his left, he looked around him with an air of utter beatitude, so that even the uncongenial Mrs. Piom-Bino whispered to Mr. Brown, "How he loves his grandmamma."

For Aurelio held Mrs. Quince's hand in his. He gave her a beautiful slice of meat off his own plate, twice he rose and kissed her warmly—once for himself, and once for *la Mamma*. Altogether it seemed to be proved conclusively that never in the world had a young man been more devoted to his grandmother.

The turkey was delicious, and the roast beef was, as Mrs. Reeder expressed it, as tender as butter. The red wine, made in some back premises in Soho, was voted excellent. There is no doubt that the presence of a

Prince is an enlivening circumstance in almost any society.

Over the trifle Mrs. Reeder made a despairing snatch at her vanishing prestige. "I suppose," she said to the young man, "you know Sir 'Arold Giddings?"

Aurelio placed his forefinger upon his brow and pondered for a moment. "I dare say," he answered, "I tink I do, but for ze moment I do not recall."

Mrs. Reeder bridled. "He and his lady are great friends of mine. He was an Alderman, and the King knighted him himself."

Aurelio straightened himself, and an indescribable cloud of cold dignity seemed to descend on him. "Ah, no," he returned, aloofly. "I have met ze Lord Mayor, of course, good man; but Aldermans—no."

Mrs. Reeder's purple face turned almost black. Then somebody—no one ever knew who—gave a nervous laugh, and it was Mrs. Quince who tried to restore peace.

"Oh, but Au—Giulio, you don't understand English society," she murmured, hesitatingly. "Sir Alfred—Sir Arthur—oh, dear me, I mean the gentleman Mrs. Reeder mentioned, is very well-known, quite the friend of all the nobility."

Aurelio looked at her down his nose. "Excuse me, Grandmamma," he said, haughtily. "You are mistaken. You forget who I am. I have no doubt that the gentleman you speak of is a most excellent person." Then with the voice of one changing the subject for purposes of social convenience, he went on: "By the way, I have not told you that the Duchess wants us to dine to-morrow night; the Prime Minister is to be there, and Lord and Lady Gloucester, and, of course, our Ambassador."

An awed hush reigned in the room for the moment.

Then Mrs. Reeder said feebly, "Sir 'Arold 'as met Mr. Asquith twice," and conversation became general.

Coffee was served in the drawing-room, a sinister apartment with dark walls and dingy tapestry furniture. Aurelio, after his recent outburst of passionate class-feeling, was extremely agreeable, and expressed the wish that Mrs. Reeder, who was so fond of her canary, could see his mother's aviary, at one of their places in the Sabine Hills. "Every kinds of birds," explained Aurelio. "Some from South America, some from China. My mother is very fond them, but my father care only for horses." He then embarked on a series of tales about his father and mother, and their different possessions. And his reckless imagery, the fluctuating nature of his accent was so pronounced that little Mrs. Quince trembled in the new slippers he had that afternoon insisted on buying her out of the fund.

Possibly, if the young man had been a little more prudent, a little more guarded in his tales, he would have done what is known as giving the show away. But so wild were his stories, so hair-raising his elucidations of the manners and customs of the Roman aristocracy, that through very amazement his listeners believed him. He knew every one in London, it appeared; his detailed description of the boudoir of a certain famous marchioness striking awe into these guileless British hearts. Only once was he in momentary danger, and that was when he described the glorious Persian carpets that in this historical apartment covered the "Tiles." Mr. Brown, who sat as usual in a distant corner of the room, bent his mild eyes upon the young man.

"*Tiles* in Piccadilly?" he asked, gently.

For a second Aurelio stared, then he laughed. "Do you not know," he retorted, his accent very strong indeed, "that when she was a young girl the lady lived

in Italy, and that when she married she had tiles put down throughout her private apartments?"—then nimbly he went on to describe the different kinds of tiles that so unexpectedly adorned the great house near the Park, and once more silence fell round him, like that that surrounds a group of Orientals when under the thrall of the professional story-teller. At ten o'clock negus and cakes and tea were served. After which, by way of ending up the perfect evening, Aurelio sang, accompanying himself with the facile skill of his kind; his dark cheeks were glowing, his eyes blazed, he was as much intoxicated as a particularly sober-living young man could be, who has had two glasses of British claret, and one glass of negus. He sang, and sang delightfully, in a slightly throaty, high baritone voice, and so great was the emotional appeal that he made, that Mrs. Reeder, who was not readily overcome, found herself talking to him in the friendliest way, while she wiped her eyes over one of his songs.

Mr. Piom-Bino, who had been out and returned not quite so indisputedly sober as might have been wished, created a diversion by calling Aurelio Royal Highness, for the excellent reason that after all a Prince is a Prince, English or Italian. The rest of the party, however, having subdued their tongues to the strange word, called him Principino. Innumerable were the times that attractive title was uttered that night.

As the evening went on, Mrs. Quince became more quiet and had very little to say, excepting when the enthusiasm of one of the other guests forced her to agree that her grandson was a perfect duck; and so awfully distinguished; or of being so obviously a Prince that no one could mistake him for anything else. Indeed, Aurelio in his perfectly correct, though slightly shabby, best clothes, his brilliant Bond Street shirt, and perfect new

pumps, might well, as far as looks were concerned, have been the great gentleman he pretended. The real Principino, the poor little Giulio, had he been there, would have cut no such figure, for he was small and surly, and devoted all of his time when in society to devouring his finger-nails.

At last twelve o'clock came, and the party broke up. There was much coquetry, and a little feigned reluctance when the Principino kissed the ladies' hands, and the whole party conducted the young man down the stairs. At the archway he turned.

"Mind you are in time for lunch, Grandmamma," he called out, waving his hat. "The American Ambassador has only a little time."

The American Ambassador! Quietly Mrs. Pentecost's boarders went back into the house and separated for the night. Never had Mrs. Quince been wished good-night with such fervour.

"I'll not forget to send you that jar of ginger," Mrs. Piom-Bino told her. "I'm sure the Principino will enjoy it."

And even Mrs. Reeder gave the little woman's hand a friendly squeeze. "You're going to the Ritz to-morrow," she said. "I am lunching with a lady and gentleman in Bayswater. You will be going by Underground, of course? We might go together."

Mrs. Quince, looking up, met Mr. Brown's quiet gaze. "Thank you, Mrs. Reeder," she returned, with a little toss of her head. "I'm going to take a taxi."

* * * * *

To the excited imaginations of Mrs. Pentecost's guests, Mrs. Quince lunched with her grandson on Christmas Day at the Ritz, but in reality the little lady and the young man partook of modest good cheer in Soho.

Aurelio was in a state of greatest delight over his achievements of the night before.

"Oh, that old *Canaglia!* that old witch!" he cried, waving the Chianti flask recklessly over Mrs. Quince's glass. "Never shall I forget her face when I told her about my mother's ropes of pearls. Oh, Per Bacco! *my mother!* The Signora Principessa would die if she knew that I called myself her son!"

Mrs. Quince nodded. "Yes, I suppose she wouldn't like it. She was always very proud Carrie was."

"Carrie?" queried the young man, his huge brown eyes glowing with curiosity.

"The Principessa's name is Carrie," returned the little lady.

"*Eh diamine*, the Signora Principessa's, my beloved mamma's name is Violetta."

Mrs. Quince laid down her fork and leaned back; she was a little pale; she was able to bear with bravery the fact that her daughter had given her up at her husband's bidding; her grieving for not being able to see her grandchild had become dimmed by time, as grief, by the wisdom of God, always does. Having used her little capital on the occasion of her daughter's marriage, for the clothes and appurtenances that her fierce little American pride could not allow the girl to go without, she was now, at the beginning of her old age, with a fortitude all the more admirable because she was utterly unconscious of it, that sad thing, the poorest one of a group of several unfriendly women. And all these things she bore well. But somehow this business of the name was almost too much for her, and her childlike blue eyes filled with tears.

"Caroline Sarah was her name," she exclaimed a moment later with a little burst of fierceness. "It was her grandmother's name, she didn't ought to have changed

it. Hard and cruel, hard and cruel, she always was!" Then suddenly she added, "My baby," and the tears rolled down her face.

Aurelio sprang to his feet, and putting one arm around her shoulders, mopped her eyes dexterously with his beautifully fine, highly scented cambric handkerchief (both these princely attributes were provided by the fund): "Don't cry, don't cry," he murmured, as unconscious as a child of the various pairs of eyes fixed on him. "She is a horrible woman, a terrible selfish person; I 'ave never liked her, no, nobody likes her. What does it matter what she calls herself?"

Mrs. Quince was tearful, but she had a sense of humour, and the young man's thus attempting to console her tickled that sense. "That's all right," she said, "sit down. My! what lovely perfume!"

Aurelio flourished his handkerchief with grace and delicacy before his face. "Peau d'Espagne," he announced, "Bond Street."

Then she perceived that on his little finger he wore a large diamond, which couldn't possibly have come out of the fund.

"My gracious!" she exclaimed. "Where did you get that ring?"

He laughed, wagging his finger so that the diamond sparkled. "There is a jeweller in the City who is an Italian; the ring is not mine. I borrowed it."

"I never heard of a jeweller lending a ring before."

He grinned gracelessly. "Nor I, but"—he explained with a sudden air of extreme demureness, his lambent eyes downcast, his cherry coloured lips drawn down at the corners—"he has a—wife."

Mrs. Quince took this bit of information very calmly, for she didn't in the least understand what the young rascal meant. He saw this, and it in a curious way added

to the charm the little elderly lady had for him. Like most Italians he was a shrewd student of character and of an analytical turn of mind, and the little American, with her queer mixture of sharpness and innocence, was quite new to him. So he didn't in the least feel, the handsome youth of twenty, that he was wasting his Christmas Day in spending it thus with the Signora Principessa's mother.

In the afternoon they went to a cinema; then Mrs. Quince went home to rest, for she was dining out with her grandson. This time at the Italian Ambassador's Aurelio arrived at half-past seven, for ambassadors always dine at eight, in a taxi, and Mrs. Pentecost, at the instigation of the boarders, herself opened the door to bring the young nobleman in. There was a round of handshaking and seasonal compliments, and the Principino with the bland affability of his class deigned to accept a glass of Mrs. Reeder's sherry, a gift this, from the stockbroking gentleman in West Hampstead; and while he was standing sipping at his wine, with an air of profound appreciation, he made the great announcement.

"I know you will all be sorry to hear," he said, his accent very marked, "but you are to lose my beloved Grandmother. I am taking her back to Rome with me to-morrow."

Various were the exclamations and questions; every one expressed regret at losing Mrs. Quince, but every one declared that the step was a perfectly natural one for her to take, considering that the Principessa was her only daughter.

"Yes," Aurelio agreed; "my mother can't stand it any longer. Her arms are aching to—how does one say?—embrace her parent."

Mrs. Quince stood very quietly by him in the grey

gown, a handsome black velvet cloak on her shoulders. (Aurelio always refused to tell how he got that cloak.) She was a little pale Mr. Brown noticed as he stood quietly behind his chair. Poor Mrs. Quince, she was pale, because, although these people had been selfish even when not unkind, and because although she had thoroughly enjoyed the carrying out of her revenge, she was, as all generous-hearted people are, a little ashamed of having taken them in.

"I hope you won't all forget me," she stammered, feeling as she spoke how absurd the words were. "I shall always remember you." Then for the first time Mr. Horace Brown's voice was heard.

"You speak as if you were going to China; after all, you are not going so very far away."

"Not far!" exclaimed Mrs. Piom-Bino. "My word, Mr. Brown, I have never been there. Have you?"

Mr. Brown stroked his neat grey moustache and looked at Aurelio with profound gravity.

As Aurelio met his eyes—Aurelio suddenly knew. Aurelio knew that Mr. Brown knew, and on their way to Soho in the taxi as he chatted and laughed, and explained to the little lady that he had found for her in Battersea a much nicer home than Mrs. Pentecost's, his busy, alert mind was working with his new knowledge, and suddenly leaning forward he kissed his companion. "You are feeling lonely," he told her, "because you are leaving that place where you have been so long, but you must not be lonely. I shall often come to London, and though I am not your grandson, I wish—I wish I were."

"Oh, Aurelio!" she exclaimed.

He nodded. "Yes, and I come twice a year on business, and if I want it, they'd give me a position in the London branch. Shall we go on pretending you are my *Nonna*—my Grandmother?"

Poor Mrs. Quince was touched, for she was feel lonely, and she did dread moving into another house even although by so doing, she should appear to the boarders, and particularly to Mrs. Reeder, to have been transported to the princely glories of Rome; and Aurelio was a dear boy. He was, she knew, going to be one of those men who, while they will make women suffer, at least never bore them; whatever he might become in the passage of time, Aurelio Ruffo would always be entertaining. So she patted his hand—the diamond on which had visibly affected the boarders—and they spent a very happy evening in their little restaurant.

* * * * *

Early the next morning as the punctual Mr. Brown left No. 3 on his way to the City, he was surprised to find in the street a few hundreds of yards away from the house, a very dandified young man in a tight-waisted overcoat and brand-new gloves awaiting him. After shaking hands the two men walked on together.

* * * * *

The next night Mrs. Quince who, to tell the truth, had cried more than was favourable to her appearance, was sitting in lonely state in her new room, at Mrs. MacCutcheon's Private Hotel in Battersea. The room was very, very small, being one of those known as a hall-bedroom. It was hardly wider than the passage outside, and it was on the top of four very long flights of stairs. But it was clean, the indefatigable Aurelio having searched the neighbourhood till he found a room that satisfied him in this respect, and it was so cheap that Mrs. Quince felt that here she could do without that extra five pounds that usually helped her through the winter. For the two conspirators had, as Aurelio with much joy said, blown every penny of the fund.

Mrs. MacCutcheon's was a very respectable house of

its kind, but poor Mrs. Quince that first evening, a sudden rainstorm beating at the window, longed with bitter intensity for the familiar troubles of Haycock Place. She would have been glad to see—if the heroic truth must be told—even Mrs. Reeder. At that moment, her dinner, composed of a boiled egg and cup of tea, was over. She had no rocking chair; only one comfort was left to her, and going to her dressing-table she opened what she herself would have called her bureau drawer, and took from it a new piece of chewing gum, alluringly wrapped in silver paper.

"I shall feel better to-morrow," she told herself, sternly; "this is just nervousness, and missing that boy. Lors, how I *do* miss Aurelio!" His photograph stood on her table, a new and beautiful one that he had given her. He had also given her a length of beautiful black silk for a gown. And he was going to write to her, and she was to write to him. She had certainly gained a friend, and one whom she truly loved, through her scheme of vengeance. But the friend was at that moment tearing Italy-wards through the night, and she was here all alone.

Then, just as Aurelio had arranged it, that artistic stage-manager's sense of fitness having decided on the very minute it was to happen, in came Mr. Brown. Mr. Horace Brown with a bunch of flowers carefully pinned together in one hand, and a rather large parcel in the other.

Little Mrs. Quince was so glad to see him that it was some minutes before she realised that he ought to believe that she was on her way to Italy. She hung his coat up on the nail on the door, side by side—oh, presage! with her own little mauve dressing-gown, and they sat down by the tiny fire.

She loved the flowers, and put them in a jug, then he untied the parcel and displayed his more solid offerings.

"I know," he said, hesitatingly, "that it is sometimes hard to accustom oneself to a new table, and I remembered your fondness for sardines. I have bought you a few boxes. These," touching another little box, "are dates, stuffed with walnuts."

"My favourite candy," she said. "How wonderful! How did you guess?"

"I didn't guess," said Mr. Brown, unwarily. "The Principino told me."

Even then Mrs. Quince didn't realise that he had no business at all to know where she was. And when the final offering, a pair of beautiful shiny goloshes, that exactly fitted her little narrow feet, had been tried on, with rapture she suddenly asked, her face a comical mixture of dismay and delight: "But how did you know I was here?"

"The Principino told me," repeated Mr. Brown.

"Oh, that boy! He—he——"

"My dear Mrs. Quince, I had ventured to hope that you would be glad to see me, at least"—he added a little ponderously—Mr. Brown was perhaps a little on the ponderous side—"that my coming would not be unpleasant to you."

When her excitement had subsided Mr. Brown explained.

"The Principino waited for me yesterday morning outside the house and explained it all to me."

"My sakes! What a boy, and he never said a word to me about it. How surprised you must have been, Mr. Brown."

Mr. Brown shook his head, and there was a twinkle in his kind eyes. "Well, no, Mrs. Quince, to tell you the truth, I wasn't surprised. I suspected it from the first. And then something in the Principino's voice the night before last confirmed me."

"Of course," faltered Mrs. Quince, "you know that he really isn't the Principino?"

"Of course. What is his name?"

And she told him all about the beguiling Aurelio. Unconsciously as she talked she told him a great deal about her daughter, and he was very gentle as he listened.

"I think," he said at last, "that I'd try to put her out of my mind entirely if I were you. She seems very heartless."

Mrs. Quince nodded sadly. "Yes, she always was, even as a young girl, but you see, it was a great chance for her, to marry the Prince. You might not think it," she added, "but we were quite humble folks. My father kept a store out West, and I never had any particular schooling, and when Carrie grew up—her father was dead long before—I drew out all my savings and took her to Italy. She had set her mind on going to Italy, somehow. We lived in a little *pension*, and one day the Prince saw her on the Pincio and followed her home. I can't tell you," the little woman broke out, clasping her hands and flushing, "I can't tell you, and you'd never guess, what it was he thought at first about Carrie and me. But I soon made him see there was only one way for any gentleman to get my Dotter, and he had to take it."

She was silent for a while, and the grey, dull, middle-aged man looked at her as one looks at people who have had great romances in their lives. Presently he rose to go, having promised to tell no one, what she called her continued residence in London, and took both her hands in his. "I am going to move too," he told her. "I don't like No. 3 any more. Would you like me to move somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

Mrs. Quince blushed, and tried to draw her hands away, for she knew quite suddenly that her old friend

was going to propose to her. And Mr. Brown did propose to her. It doesn't much matter what he said, but that he did say it mattered so immensely to the tired, lonely little expatriate that she cried in his arms for sheer joy. She had always liked him, and now she felt she could really love him, and oh, the beauty and glory of not being brave for a few minutes, and just behaving, as she told herself, like a silly girl. In her excitement and delight, she went down-stairs with him, and herself opened the hall door. Here he kissed her, and then she watched him disappearing sedately into the night.

She ran back upstairs, and opening her purse counted her money. She had very little, but one thing she would do, "Expense or no expense," she said aloud, "the first thing I'll do to-morrow morning is to send a cablegram to Aurelio."

THREE TIMES

THE FIRST TIME

As I left the Marrables' house in Bayswater, the day that I first saw Mrs. Moulton, I found, less to my surprise than to my dread of a detestable homeward journey, that I had come out with only a penny in my pocket.

I trust that I love my fellow-creatures, but the older I grow—and I was, even on that odious, grimy, November day, nearer fifty than forty—the greater becomes the clarity of my recognition of the blameworthy fact that I do not like them; and there are days when the nerves under whose tyranny I make a mild best of a bad job, almost audibly, not to say vociferously, draw the line at a 'bus. It is, moreover, my belief that even in their hours of ease, when resting, empty, in some horrid haunt of their own, far from the revolting specimens of humanity that seem for the most part to make use of their dubious and certainly unwilling hospitality, 'buses retain their smell; their smell, horrid—indescribable, but unmistakable even to a blind man in Heaven—could a blind man in Heaven be confronted with one. This was one of the days when I could not travel by 'bus. My rooms being at the top of four endless flights of dark stairs, taking, in my—on that day—shillingless state, a taxi would mean two ascents of my mountain path, as Marable calls it, and for that I was not prepared. I walked over slippery and foul pavements to the road romantically and pathetically known to its neighbours, even in those days of its sordid decadence, as The Grove, and

stood at a corner viewing, as they bungled by, the 'buses that might have taken me as far as the Bayswater Road. A brown rain was falling dully, and the fog thickened, but I found that I could not face the 'bus atmosphere nor the mental condition of the conductors—'bus conductors are always irresistibly inclined to dislike me—so, very wearily, I walked.

Violet Marrable had tired me, as she always does, and I was sorry, to the point, or nearly to the point, of pain, for poor Jim. So, when I reached the Bayswater Road, and the rain, discomposed apparently by the silently persistent opposition of the fog, had withdrawn, I walked to the gate to which my rooms, on the other side of the Park, were most nearly opposite, went into the Park, and, selecting a seat for its qualities of emptiness and comparative seclusion, sat down.

It was warmish, muggy and unpleasant, but my poor leg, as my less shapely foot is called by some of my friends, found a resting-place on the bench, and in the weakness and physical distress that are unfortunately integral parts of the entity known as Vincent Creese, I shut my eyes and tried to rest.

When, at the end of possibly four minutes, I opened my eyes, they were staring straight at the woman whose story this is—Emma Moul.

She was sitting on a bench, hitherto unnoticed by me, that stood not quite opposite my own. She sat on the very edge of the bench, her knees apart, her ungloved hands on her knees, her eyes—eyes of a wildness and anguish almost ludicrously unsuited to the fat, reddish face that looked to have a slightly rough surface—staring straight before her. Her small, unmodelled mouth was intensely, naturally red, and it was screwed into an absurd bunch that would have made me laugh but for the eyes.

These eyes, that saw me no more than if I had been in Perthshire, were indescribably miserable and distraught, but they were dry as a bone, and as I watched the poor thing, I longed for tears to come to them.

For several minutes I sat staring at her much as I might have stared at some one on the stage, so utter was her unconsciousness of me, and then, in my knowledge of my inability to help her, and my trespassing—probably to her offensive—sympathy, I rose very quietly and started to leave the Park. She did not move as I drew near, and I was able to observe that under the shapelessness of her face there was a wild and unflinching resolution. It was a brave and bitter face, blurred and misrepresented by encroaching fat.

The tragedy of the fat man or woman has never yet been written, and it is a poignant one. I am not an observer of life—alas! I am only a spectator—but it is owing to the keenness of my pang of appreciation of this truth that, just as I passed Emma Moulton, my bad foot made a mistake and brought me to the ground with a thud. Before I knew it, I was being helped up with immense skill, as well as gentleness, by the woman whose face had preoccupied me.

"Oh, it's all right," she said, in answer to my thanks; "I'm a trained nurse."

And then I saw that she was, indeed, in uniform. My fall had shaken me pretty badly, and I sat with her for a moment on her bench, until the pain should cease. She took a sharply professional look at me, ending with my thick-soled boot, and then put the name to the hip-disease with which I had been born.

"Yes."

"It's bad," she answered, with an effort, as her interest in me died, and the flood of her own affairs came over her again. Then she not so much relapsed into silence,

as was engulfed by a rising tide of irrepressible preoccupation; her eyes—shrewd kind, grey eyes they were—stared once more out across the foggy lawn beyond us. When I rose, unable further to bear the sense of intrusion that had come over me, I said very gently that I feared she was in trouble.

I had overcome my shyness in vain, for she did not even hear me, and I limped off unanswered and—despite the real pity inspired in any thinking man or woman by the sight of a capable, useful soul down and out through trouble—relieved. The coward side of every one will understand the feeling.

It was, however, as I left the Park that the Strange Thing happened.

Opposite the gate from which I issued, there was—and is—a row of tall, thin, well-bred looking houses, expressionless and characterless as their human prototypes; brown houses with high steps like high bosoms, and senseless bits of rudimentary sculpture over their windows like made-up eyebrows. Such houses are to me desolating in their commonplace opulence; the last houses on earth which—of course, all of us artistic-minded, unproductive, appreciators fail in imagination—I can conceive of as scenes of real emotion.

Therefore I stood still with amazement when the door of No. 10 burst open and remained so with a look of open-mouthed surprise, while, bare-headed, and in a velvet house jacket, Herbert Brightman rushed down the steps, across the road and past me into the Park.

(It must be remembered that for fifteen years after that day I knew neither Nurse Moults name nor his; I use them thus early in the story merely as a means of simplification for the reader.)

If Mrs. Moults had been in despair, Brightman was plainly in a state of absolute terror. The man positively

ran, his shoulders hunched, his thin, in-turned knees brushing each other as he tore away into the now once more rapidly thickening fog.

I stood looking after him, wondering at the strangeness of the coincidence that would, in a few seconds, bring these two immense and immediate tragedies face to face. Then, as the gaping door of No. 10 remained, with its glimpse of brown and crimson ugly splendour, a positive invitation to marauders, I mounted the steps and rang the bell. A tall parlourmaid, her face red and swollen, answered it.

"A gentleman just rushed out——" I explained.

She nodded and, wiping her nose with a wet ball of handkerchief, thanked me. "It was poor Master, sir," she added. "The Mistress is dying, and he——"

A dreadful, weak scream from upstairs cut her short, a scream that I still remember, so helpless and hopeless and heart-tearing it was.

A shudder went over the maid, and as I turned hurriedly away I heard her saying that it had been like that for days, so that it was no wonder that her master——

That happened fifteen years ago.

THE SECOND TIME

It was an April afternoon that brought me for the second time into contact with Emma Moulton.

I had been staying with friends in Oxford, and it was on my way home, on the platform at Reading, that I at first actually, in the flesh, beheld her, though my recognition of her occurred some time later. My first thought as she swam into my ken was ungallant, referring as it did, irresistibly, and it is my firm belief naturally, to the size of the poor soul.

She wore what I am sure—though I am a man blessedly unlearned in, or even untroubled by a fallacious

belief in my knowledge of, such matters—was a mistaken choice, a black-and-white striped coat and skirt. Moreover, the stripes were applied some of them vertically and some of them horizontally, with a desolating, even disastrous effect. For her bulk was not of a decently restrained, firm kind; she appeared to be of a gelatinous consistency. It occurred to me, as I watched her purchasing at a bookstall reading matter for her journey, that she looked as if she were about to melt, or thaw.

Even though I am of a naturally chaste mind, the idea flashed, instantly and resolutely banished, but for a moment vivid almost to concreteness, of a bath-tub—And I shuddered and walked away.

My compartment, just before the train started, was subject to what I suppose all travellers who are first comers in their own particular pen regard as, not the arrival, but the unjustifiable invasion, of other people; a young man and a young woman, the latter of whom, it was obvious, was to remain.

They were well-bred young people, but as they did not know me, and as I looked quite unlike any one they would wish to know, my mild presence presented to them no obstacle to the prosecution of what I gathered to be a not infrequent occurrence between them—a quarrel. The girl—she was not more than one or two and twenty—whose delicately upturned nose possessed a quality of impertinence that charmed me, was less angry than her husband, and an element of teasing was visible in her manner, whereas he—he was a dark man with a rather smoky-looking skin and remarkably thick eyelashes—was deadly serious in his mood of injured bitterness, whence I naturally extended to him, in my instantaneous, sharp-bitten vision of their future, my sympathy; he loved her much more than she loved him. Just as the train was about to start, the young husband had descended

and stood by the door exchanging acrimonious adieux with his wife; my fat woman of the bookstall barged into him—I use the now familiar slang word, as must have done the man who first used it in such a way, because it brilliantly illuminates the scene—and got into the compartment, sideways.

A porter pushed her bag after her, and, sitting down in two seats, she began a hectic search for pennies.

Thus it was that it was not until the train was actually on its way out of the station that Mrs. Moulton raised her eyes and saw the already relieved and re-cheered young woman with the oddly characteristic turned-up nose. The young woman sat opposite me, by the window; the Fat Lady occupied the rest of the young one's side of the compartment, thus facing me.

It was when the young lady rose to take off her jacket that the other perceived her, and, as she perceived her, gave a short, odd groan, and, leaning back in her corner, closed her eyes and turned an odd, extraordinarily unattractive shade of what can best be described as olive-grey. She did not quite faint, but was so near it that the other woman and I both rushed to help her. I opened the window, and Mrs. Guintana—for that I learned some time after was her very un-English, but somehow suitable, name—produced a stumpy, bottle-green bottle and was about to hold it to her suffering fellow-creature's nose, when, what was not only to our amazement, but very nearly our terror, so intensely strong was the impulse behind the gesture, the fainting woman pushed her away.

"No, no," she gasped, her vast bosom heaving in a way that would have made the immediate sickness of a small cameo cherub she wore as a brooch seem perfectly natural, "not you, not you——"

And then the huge unwieldy creature made a tremen-

dous effort and dragged herself from the dark depths of her part-unconsciousness, emerging pale but victorious into the every-day light of the watery afternoon. It was as she subjected herself to this triumphant ordeal that I remembered her, and, as she murmured some kind of an apology to her neighbour, I saw that the agony in which I had seen her so many dull years ago, had survived the passage of time and was still with her. Fat, shapeless, ugly, badly dressed as she was, she was still tragedy incorporate. At length she closed her eyes and seemed to sleep, and it was while she lay thus that at X—— Mrs. Guintana—still wrapped to us both in anonymity—got out.

A few minutes later the sleeper stirred sluggishly, opened her eyes and looked round with an odd appearance of stealth. I continued my reading, when, suddenly she spoke—

“Where’s the girl, and what’s her name?”

As she spoke I looked up. She was sitting opposite me in the attitude in which she had sat that day in the Park, her knees apart, her hands spread over them, and her mild, lashless red-edged eyes full of faint April sunlight. The sunlight, so unkind to her outer surface, was, I observed in that agitating moment, generous to her eyes themselves—or to that thing, not on the surface, that looked out of them.

“I do not know,” I answered.

To my horror she groaned aloud and cried out—

“Oh, my God, what a fool I am! I thought you were together——”

I explained, and as I spoke she glanced at my foot, her corrugated, wide-pored brows stirred in thought, and she recognised me.

“The world’s a small place,” she said, as one does at

times, controlling her emotion admirably. "To think of seeing *you*. And—you don't know who she was?"

"I never saw her before in my life," I assured her.

Again she groaned, and then, after a moment she added: "It was *that* day that it happened."

I nodded. "Yes, I remember that you were in trouble——" But my assumption, it seemed, was wrong. She shook her head—in which a small hat of the kind known, I believe, as a toque, was insecurely perched. "Oh," she eagerly returned, "it was after *that*——"

Whatever it was, its memory was unbearable, for quite suddenly she grew olive-grey again; and again I had to watch her while she, as it were, made a windlass of her will-power, and pulled herself up out of the well. When she was, to continue the metaphor, safe on the brink, she said to me with a look, a voice, of tragedy that positively frightened me: "You must have *met* him!"

A moment later she was telling me the story, and her face, her manner, were so terrible, that as the slow words came, I felt like a man under the torture of slow drowning.

Because, I suppose, of some minor accident to the locomotive, the train had stopped, and it was here, in the midst of a vast stretch of watery, yellowish-green meadowland, where willow-trees cast phantom shadows, and a few distant cows were slowly swallowed up by a little, furtive mist, that I heard the story.

"I was only five-and-thirty then," she began, "but I had been married seventeen years, and my—my girl was sixteen. My husband—well, he had never been any good to me, except just in giving me Pearl. And I had gone on with my nursing—they didn't know at St. Ambrose's that I was married. I'd been ill for some time—good for nothing and tired and jumpy, but we nurses all get like that sometimes, because we all—all the decent

ones—overwork. Besides—I was too worried about Pearl to think much about myself. She was ill. Really ill. Tuberculosis. Oh, I knew! I put on mufti and took her to a big man in Harley Street, and, because I was the mother, he—made it as pleasant as he could. Talked about her age, and milk, and country air, and so on, but I was a nurse, and *I knew*. So there was that. Mind you,” she broke off to say sharply to me, “I had no family. All dead, and a good thing too, and no friends worth speaking of. I was absolutely alone, with no money, a tuberculous girl, and myself—cancer. Oh,” she added, with a dreary and dreadful air of triumph, “I knew! Well—I won’t try to tell you what I went through. No man could understand. The pain had got worse, and the week before that day I went to another specialist and he confirmed my—knowledge. As usual, he talked about the ‘chance’ I had if operated on at once, and so on; but I’d nursed too many cases of the same thing. *I knew*.”

It was dreadful, this talk of tuberculosis and cancer, in the narrow railway carriage, the quiet of the early spring evening spread round us.

“There was,” she went on, presently, “another thing: Pearl—she was like her father, Pearl was.”

I knew at once what she meant, but she went on. “The most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life and—and loving and affectionate, but—— Well,” she sat up very erect in her corner and said with an awful resoluteness, “she was a liar. And where a girl of sixteen’s a liar, she is in danger of even worse things: particularly with Pearl’s looks.”

Her predicament, her suffering in those old days were to me very understandable. Poor mother—and poor Pearl! As she went on, the situation became clearer and clearer to me—I could feel her agony, her ghastly

medical knowledge, whereby none of the pitiful illusions that, like moss, soften the paths of most people towards death, could be hers. She was familiar with tuberculosis, she was familiar with cancer. *She knew.*

And I could see her lying awake at night, in some poor room, peering into her Pearl's future. With every care Pearl's health might be made good, but without every care, Pearl's very soul would be lost. There is much that is good in stupidity; a stupid woman would never have suffered as did this poor, plain, flabby-fleshed Emma Moulton.

And to think that all she had needed to make her die comparatively happy was a few thousand pounds! Money would have bought at least some kind of a home for the potentially peccant Pearl! Money would certainly have secured at least the physical care needed for the girl's bodily health. But money Emma Moulton had had none.

"I'd saved eighty pounds," she was saying, when I came back after a mental excursion that seemed, to me, so infinitely more elucidating than were her words, "but my quarter's rent was due, and I owed seven pounds to a dressmaker——"

"For Pearl," I heard myself say, but she took no notice.

"——and there were other things. So—I stood to die and leave—my little girl with only about ten pounds in the world. And she with her father's nature——"

I took another short flight, so to speak, in the aeroplane her words had built for me, and this time I found the father, poor thing, and *his* nature. . . .

"That evening in the Park I had just been told I must be operated on *at once*," I heard her say, presently. "Just before you came along I had decided that to get money for Pearl I would sell my soul."

She paused, and then added slowly, "Well, I *did*."

The rest of the story was so dramatic, so terrible, that I have forgotten her words, and must tell it in my own. The man I saw rush from his house into the Park was he who bought her soul. He met her face to face in the fog, and she, seeing that he was in a suicidal condition, stopped him—her training forcing her to use her knowledge of how to quiet him. The only sentence of this part of her narrative that I have ever been able to recapture is this: "—and she, too, was dying of cancer."

She too!

She was the unhappy man's wife, whose awful screams I had heard.

Her husband had promised her long before that when things got too bad he would help her to end it all. And on that November day things had got too bad and—he was afraid.

"He wanted to end the pain for her?" I asked.

Mrs. Moulton nodded. "Of course. That was why——"

The long and short of it was that the man, seeing that his chance companion was a trained nurse, offered her a very large sum of money if she would go with him to his wife and give her an overdose of morphia. . . . Cannot one see it all? The poor woman's struggle, her longing for the money that would save her child, her pity for the suffering, weak man, and above—a thousand times above—all, her knowledge, as a nurse, of the mercy to the racked and broken sick woman, of the so-easy-to-give little overdose. To her it would be as easy as signing her name with a practised old fountain pen. Finally, of course, as the offered bribe grew larger and larger, she gave in. Then came the walk across the road and up those high steps, the unseen entrance, the stealthy mount-

ing of the stairs, the silent opening of the sick-room door.

"Was she conscious?" I asked.

"Yes, and thanked me. 'God bless you, Nurse,' she said. . . ." Mrs. Moulton—Nurse Moulton—stayed in that awful room only a moment, and then, leaving the man with his dying wife, made her way to the house door.

"On the stairs I found—a child——" The child had long, fair hair, and a lovely little face, and asked Nurse how her mother was. What Nurse told her I have forgotten. Nurse made her way home in the dusk, a cheque for two thousand pounds in her glove.

Yes, one can see it. . . .

Suddenly, as one of the cows disappeared entirely in the fog, it occurred to me that there was in the story a disparity that, but for the context, would have been comic.

With some embarrassment I suggested to Mrs. Moulton that—well, that, in effect, *she* was still alive.

She laughed. "Yes. It was not cancer after all."

I felt that she should have shown some shame at this circumstance, or at least that she should have hinted at an apology for it. She did not. She merely added that Pearl, too, was alive and well.

"Then—the money did good," I murmured, abashed in an unreasonable way.

Mrs. Moulton wiped her face, which was, indeed, unbecomingly as well as perceptibly damp. "It wasn't tuberculosis," she declared, in a mechanical voice.

For a wild moment I feared I was going to laugh. Was she about to tell me that the third lady of the story didn't have cancer? Or that it wasn't morphia? Or even that *she* didn't die?

The train started just then, and for a few minutes Mrs. Moulton was silent, and then in words that I could

not set down, even if I could recall them, she told me what was after all the *real* tragedy of the story: her endless, relentless, pitiless remorse for what she had done. Her manner, in spite of the poverty of her words, was so poignant that it was almost unbearable. I so acutely realised her suffering all through these years that I could have shrieked at her to stop, to spare me. The recital made me ill. Pearl's father, too, had done what such men—wonderful Emma Moulton to have made me know Moulton so well!—so often do. He had Come Back. And he was still Back. He was obnoxious, I knew; I also knew that he was hopelessly reformed. In short Mr. Moulton was ending his days in what I feel must be called a condition of unbridled respectability.

Pearl was married and her parents "hardly ever saw her." Her husband was "in" Oriental dried fruit and was very successful. By the time the real blow fell on me I intimately knew all about all of them. Just as the train stopped outside Paddington, apparently for the purpose of exchanging civilities with its fellows, Mrs. Moulton, *femme funeste*, delivered the blow.

"That girl who was in here with us," she said dully, "was *her* daughter."

"Whose?"

"Yes. The fair little girl on the stairs; the child of the lady I—murdered."

There was really something peculiarly horrible in the way the poor thing said it; her very matter-of-factness was appalling. Mrs. Moulton was *used* to having murdered a lady! The memory, grievous and dreadful though it was to her, miserable though it had made her life, was, after all, a part of her life. Literally, I shuddered as I gathered up my belongings, and though I am by nature a very abstemious man, I felt a distinct long-

ing for, and as distinct a determination to have, an immediate and generous whisky-and-soda.

As I moved about I saw something white on the floor, and picked it up. It was an opened, post-marked letter, addressed to Mrs. Stanley Guintana, somewhere in St. John's Wood.

Even as I read it Mrs. Moulton snatched it from me, her dew-lapped face, which really almost looked as if it needed a few half-embedded currants to perfect it—scarlet with a new and overwhelming emotion.

"It's hers—hers——"

Then she thrust the envelope into my face, bidding me read it, as she could not make it out! Limply I obeyed and she put it into her pocket.

"Now," she said, as the train slowed up in the unromantic penumbra of the station, "I can do it at last."

Her voice was so tense, so full of a kind of awful relief, that I passionately looked a question.

"I can make them take the money back. *I have it.* An aunt of mine died in New Zealand only about a year after I did it, and she left me *exactly two thousand pounds.* I never told Ernest—" Ernest I knew was Mr. Moulton—"nor Pearl. I saved it. And now I can make them take it back."

My question was a natural one, but she regarded me for a moment with a scorn which was actually hostile.

"Do you think," she retorted, as she wedged herself sideways into the door, and plopped on to the happily concrete platform, "that I haven't searched for it?"

And as we made our way to the exit she explained. *She had never known where the house was!* She had not known by what gate she had come into the Park; she had not known by which gate the frenzied man had led her on her dreadful mission. It is incredible but it is true.

"Round and round I've walked," she said, "many, many a time. You see, I couldn't ring at bells and inquire." . . .

No, she couldn't have done that. And it appeared that as time went on the idea had become more and more fixed in her head that once she had "made them take the money back" she might find peace.

"It was, after all, a merciful thing to do," I ventured, as we stood outside the station waiting for taxis.

Poor Emma Moulton shook her head at me, and answered with desolating logic: "But I didn't do it for that. I did it for money."

I went my way aching all over, as is my habit after any strong emotion. I wished that I had had the wits to remind her that, when all was said and done, she had not done it for herself; she *had done it for Pearl*. But somehow I felt that Pearl would not, as things had turned out, be a very satisfactory argument.

THE THIRD TIME

Often during the following months I wished I had asked Mrs. Moulton to let me know the result of her call on Mrs. Guintana, but in the confusion of parting I had not done it.

Mrs. Moulton had not told me that I was, but I knew myself to be, her only confidant in the matter of what she so calmly called her murder, and I felt that she would be as glad to tell me the end of the singular story as I should be to hear it.

I searched in vain for her in the telephone directory, even her Ernest not appearing in that compendium, whence I concluded that his success in business might be not altogether disconnected with the fact of his being a junior, not a senior, partner.

Mrs. Guintana I did find as being something-something

Paddington, but not unnaturally I felt that my intimate knowledge of her poor mother's last hours gave me no real excuse for ringing her up.

"Mrs. Guintana?" I imagined myself murmuring into some germ-infested mouthpiece. "I am Mr. Vincent Creese, ringing you up to inquire if Mrs. Moulton, who killed your poor dear mother, has been to see you——" No, I could not do it.

Thus the rest of April, a forbidding, flower-hating May, and a pleasant-enough June passed without my having heard anything about my unfortunate fat friend.

It was on a very hot July day that I finally met her, and it was in a place that even at the time struck me as rather splendidly appropriate to the secret that bound us so oddly together. It was in a dentist's waiting-room.

My little visit was not too unhappily accomplished, and it was on my way out that I met my poor friend, coming in.

Her attire was gayish. There was about her a great deal of mauve and black and white—her fatal penchant for black and white!—and flowers crowned her.

When she saw me her flaccid face changed, a look strangely combined of relief and ironic disgust coming over it.

"My dear Mrs. Moulton," I cried—we were alone in that grisly antechamber, "what a pleasure to see you!" We shook hands.

"I've been wishing," she said, "that I knew your address."

"And I have searched in vain for yours——"

My dentist is a man of musical taste. As he waited for the coming of Emma he whistled, very sweetly, "In the Shadows," a melody henceforth full of memories for me.

"Oh yes, I went to see Mrs. Guintana," Mrs. Moulton

said. "She took the money all right. She was very kind. We had tea—very nice, though it was China, which tastes like straw——"

I could feel that my eyes were what is called sprod in my head, in my keenness to hear what the young woman had had to say to her who, after all, for whatever motive, had put her mother out of the world.

To my horror Mrs. Moulton suddenly, as she looked at me, giggled. It is a dreadful word, but there is no other for the dreadful little laugh that disturbed that vast pink face.

"I told her—oh yes, I told her," Mrs. Moulton added to the giggle, "but—you see, *she knew*."

"She knew?"

"Yes, Mr. Brightman told her, years ago."

"Who on earth," I snapped, "is Mr. Brightman?"

Splendid Mrs. Moulton, well-informed, knowledgeable Mrs. Moulton, looked at me almost in pity.

"Mr. Brightman's *the Man*," she answered. "Her father."

"Then——" I heard myself gasp, and stopped short.

"Yes, Mr. Brightman's Mrs. Guintana's father, and—the gentleman you saw that day."

Mr. Bellinger was still whistling "In the Shadows." I listened to him for a second before I could blurt out: "*The husband of the lady you——*"

Mrs. Moulton when she giggled was rather dreadful; Mrs. Moulton when she laughed was almost splendid! She laughed now, her small mouth showing much elasticity, her teeth white and healthy looking.

"Yes," she said, "the lady I murdered, only—I didn't murder her. I didn't——" she added with a fine air of clarity, "even kill her."

After a second she went on, as I didn't—I *couldn't*—speak:

"You see, *she didn't die!*"

For a moment, in my rapid envisaging of the cases of Mrs. Moulton herself, of Pearl, and now of Mrs. Brightman, I felt that there was no such thing as death; that *no* one ever died. And I was conscious of a feeling of disappointment in Mrs. Brightman. I *had* counted on Mrs. Brightman!

"Why didn't she?" I managed to say presently.

"Oh—it just wasn't cancer!"

Then, quite, I am convinced, as unexpectedly to Mrs. Moulton as it was to me, we both burst out laughing. Mrs. Moulton's cancer wasn't cancer; Pearl's tuberculosis wasn't tuberculosis; and now here was Mrs. Brightman behaving in the same way.

"What do you suppose it was?" I asked, when I could, during a pause in "In the Shadows," caused no doubt by young Bellinger's wonder about our wild laughter.

"Heaven knows. Hysteria, perhaps. After all, doctors know very little," Mrs. Moulton declared perfidiously. "But she's still alive. Her husband," she went on, glancing at her watch, "is dead."

"Ah," I exclaimed brightly, almost adding, "good!"

"Yes; he died five or six years later. I gather his wife was a good deal of a trial to him——"

So there is the story. If any surgeon or doctor should read it he will exclaim "Bosh!" But it's true for all that.

I left Mrs. Moulton at Bellinger's and went my way in the sun. Poor Mrs. Moulton!

A BERLIN ADVENTURE

ONE evening, about a year after the War began, two young Americans were sitting just inside the door of the huge Berlin Café Leopold. It was eight o'clock and the vast place was already packed with eagerly talking, eagerly drinking, men and women. For the most part they were drinking the white beer that is supposed to account for the characteristically huge bloated bodies and thin legs of the Berliners.

Although there were the usual number of men in uniform, by far the greater part of the crowd were civilians. The young Americans, Thomas Kelly and James Hard-
ing McArthur, had dined here, because of the really excellent quality of the coarsely cooked food; because they were both under thirty, and because they both worked so hard all day that by evening food was the one thing that seemed to them of really great importance.

The dinner had consisted of roast veal, served with *compôte* and salad, the huge slice of Sand-torte, an excellent sweet between a cake and a tart, a bottle of Rhine wine, and coffee.

The two young men were still sitting over their coffee, when that happened which gives rise to this little story.

"What do you suppose they make this stuff of, Mac?" Kelly was saying, tasting the dubious concoction suspiciously. "Horse-chestnuts?"

Young McArthur shook his head, "Nope, acorns, you bet."

The waiter, a flat-headed, shiny man, with a bad limp, was standing close by, and for no particular reason be-

yond that of a wish for a little joke, Kelly turned to him. "Kellner," he called, cheerfully, "what is this coffee made of?"

The waiter lurched forward, flicking at his humid brow with his napkin, "Zu Befehl?" he grunted.

"What a loon you are, Kelly," put in the other young man adding in fairly good German to the waiter, "My friend wants to know what your coffee is made of."

It was then that the queer-looking old man at the next table turned and spoke to them. "The coffee, gentlemen," he said in a metallic voice, "is made of a mixture of inferior coffee beans, ground rye, and acorns."

The joke had fallen flat, and the two young men, a little surprised, could only bow politely and thank the stranger for his information. They then lit cigarettes and went on chatting about personal matters. It seemed, however, that the old man in the shiny black coat wished for further acquaintance. Hitching his chair towards their table, he drew from his pocket a pair of spectacles, put them on, and clearing his throat in a rasping way spoke.

"You young gentlemen are Americans?" he said, looking at them shrewdly, and speaking in English.

"Yes," answered Kelly; "not likely to be English, are we?"

The old man laughed. "No, I think the only English in Germany nowadays are in prison camps." The old man took out a cigar, and was about to light it, when young Kelly, knowing the qualities of that fearsome concoction, German tobacco, hurriedly drew out a big leather case and offered it to the stranger. This offer was accepted, and the two boys, for they were hardly more, lit cigarettes. "I have been in America, it is a fine country. My brother-in-law is a brewer in Milwaukee," came from behind the cigar.

Presently Kelly laughed. "You must have been at home there. Pretty well all German, isn't it?"

McArthur nudged him under the table, and then rubbed the end of his own nose, in a way that caused the other young man to stop speaking. It was a signal arranged between them, to remind each other that, however friendly Germans were towards the strictly neutral America, it was just as well to be careful what one said in public.

At the next table a large family of lower middle-class people were devastating a huge dish of sausages and cabbage; one of them was a wounded soldier, and amidst much admiration he was describing a recent battle.

"It was beautiful," he said, "to see them running, the English, and to hear them beg for mercy from our brave fellows."

The old man with the cigar listened to them, nodding thoughtfully. "Yes," he said, "they are fine fellows our field greys, and what an army is ours. Do you not find it ridiculous, gentlemen, that France and Belgium should stand up against us?"

"Ridiculous is hardly the word," burst out Kelly, suddenly, fiery red. Again McArthur rubbed his nose, and gave his friend's knee a vigorous jog under the table, saying as he did so in his milder, more leisured way: "*Imprudent* they certainly have been."

For a moment the old man watched the ash on his cigar without speaking. "Personally, I am very sorry for the Belgians," he began at length. "It was unfortunate for them that the science of war forced our Generals to invade their country."

McArthur called the old waiter and paid the bill, for he saw that his friend's ears hadn't paled. "Come along, Kelly," he said, rising. "You have got to finish that article to-night, and I've got three hours' work before me."

They rose, retrieved their hats, and bowed ceremoniously to their self-instituted companion. The old man nodded, smiling.

"So you are journalists," he said, pleasantly. "I thought so."

"Why?" Kelly asked, moving a chair out of his way.

"Because you both have fountain pens, I see the notebook in each of your pockets, and—besides—— Well, I don't know why, but you *look* like journalists."

McArthur who had large, slightly prominent brown eyes of an unusually velvety quality, bent his long neck a little and looked down at the last speaker. "And you, sir," he said, politely, "are probably a retired professor."

They heard the old man laughing as they went through the spring door out of the stuffy, smoky atmosphere into the clear, warm night.

"What a queer old cuss!" exclaimed Kelly, as they turned away towards the Linden.

"Yes, and he was trying to draw you," remarked his friend. "I didn't like him much, and I was afraid you were going to lose your famous temper, O Hibernian! My poor nose, which was inclined to be Roman when I left home, will be a snub by the time I get back."

The two young men walked along through the crowded streets; newspapers were for sale everywhere, English and French as well as German. The crowd was not well-dressed, for no German crowd—even in Berlin's most halcyon days—was ever that; but it was as expensively clad as ever, and on most of the faces, still well fed, was a look of pride and satisfaction. In the opinion of these people their country was conquering the world, and naturally this circumstance pleased them. It was a fine night and the sky, the one thing that German ingenuity can never vulgarise, was full of stars;

Kelly gazed up at it as they stopped on a corner to let some troops pass.

"I never could get the hang of astronomy," he said, "and to this day it beats me, how down in little old Emilyville they can be sitting in their rockers in their front porches, with their eyes glued to the very stars we are looking at now."

McArthur laughed. "You'd better get a book and read up a little. I don't know much about astronomy, but that doesn't sound up to date, somehow."

They wandered on, turned into the Linden and went to the right towards the Thiergarten, it being their habit to take a walk every night before going back to work. They were employed upon the same paper, one as special correspondent, and the other, McArthur—what he called "in the soap boiling business"; that is to say, his duty was to read the German war news in all the papers, and strike what he considered a fair average between it and the English news, for a prominent Western-American daily paper. The incident of the *Lusitania* had, as every one knows, the effect of confirming in the German mind, the unshakability of American neutrality; the Hymn of Hate at this time was sung throughout the breadth of the land. England was to German intelligence a far more abominable country than Germany is, after all her unspeakable performances, even now to England; but America was in high favour. Therefore, our two young men had, up to this, experienced very few difficulties with the censor and other authorities; and with their proofs of citizenship always in their pockets, they went their ways about the great city in almost perfect ease.

Presently they came to a music-hall, and seeing posted up outside it the announcement that a troupe of coloured American singers were giving a turn there they decided

to go in. It was the usual over-heated, airless, vulgarly decorated place of its type, but the pale beer in tall narrow glasses was ice-cold, and the six or eight coloured men seated on the stage were singing like angels. McArthur, who had a wife and a little girl in America, leaned with elbows on the marble table, and covered his eyes with his hands, as the beautiful, harmonious folk-song filled the air.

Kelly, on the contrary, looked around him with interest, cautiously studying the groups near at hand. He meant to write books one day, and he had about his fellow-creatures the unquenchable thirst for knowledge that must be part of the successful novelist's equipment. Music he was in the pleasant position of not minding, and he was for the moment not in love, so he sat at ease in his comfortable little chair—his sharp grey eyes, so to speak, feeding on the meal spread out for his delectation.

Suddenly he started. Three or four tables away on his right sat a man drinking wine; he was dressed as a German foot-soldier, his head was shaved, he looked wan, stupid, and not particularly clean. His hands in particular, Kelly noticed, were decidedly dirty, the nails being broken and black. The music came to an end at this point, and McArthur shook himself out of his reverie with an effort, and made some indifferent remark. Kelly nodded hastily, and taking from his pocket his notebook unscrewed his fountain pen and wrote a few words under cover of his hand, and then handed the book to his companion and waited.

McArthur stared at him. "Nonsense," he said, incredulously.

"But it is, I tell you." They spoke very quietly, and Kelly, screwing up the bit of paper on which he had written, lit a match and burned it, rubbing the ashes to

impalpable powder on the table. Turning round inconspicuously McArthur studied the man in question for a moment. "I don't believe it," he said, finally; "we have all seen his pictures, but you never saw him?"

Kelly, whose ears were now flaming with excitement, nodded vigorously, and looking round to see if any one was within earshot, answered quietly: "Interviewed him once, just before the War, for the old *Messenger*. I tell you I am sure!"

They ordered more beer, and under cover of the next turn, which luckily was a noisy one, watched the famous English General in his remarkable disguise. "There is no good our staying here, and for God's sake don't stare at him," McArthur said, presently. "What nerves he must have!"

Kelly gave a scornful laugh. "Not stay, my dear chap? You take your foot in your hand, as Sandy McPherson says, and toddle off to by-bye if you want to. I am going to interview that Infantry man before this little old world is many hours older."

"Then I might as well say Good-bye to you now, for as sure as God made little apples you'll be in prison within twenty-four hours."

As he spoke, McArthur rose, and taking his companion's arm, did his best to persuade that more reckless spirit to come quietly home with him.

But Kelly was thrilled to the marrow, every red hair on his head seemed to bristle with excitement. "You old idiot," he said. "Don't you see it will be the scoop of my life? Is it likely I'd let such a chance slip by!" McArthur sat down.

"Oh, all right then, we'll stay."

The other young man merely laughed, for it was an understood thing between them that they always stood by each other.

As they left the music-hall, close behind their quarry, a man in a velvet jacket, with a thick bushy beard nearly as red as Kelly's hair, brushed up against them, begging their pardon gutturally in German.

Kelly answered him with careless indifference, but McArthur's brown eyes rested for a moment on the bearded face with a puzzled expression.

"Ever seen that chap before?" he murmured as he watched the door.

"Nope."

Then for a few minutes they were silent, as they threaded their polite way through the crowd, and settled down to follow the disguised Englishman. He walked along with the curious knee-action of a German foot-soldier, supplemented by the shamble of a very tired man.

"If it is he, it is a perfectly bully disguise," McArthur said; and Kelly nodded.

"You bet it is. Gee, look at the way he carries his arms! Some nerve!"

The man they were pursuing walked steadily, never failing in his curious carriage, and twice when they met officers saluted them with the galvanised jerk of the type he was representing. They were coming to a poor quarter of the town, and presently they got into a crowded tram. As the passengers got out and there was more room, the two Americans were able to get seats. The foot-soldier stood, trampled by one or two officers, his face wearing the uncomplaining, brutish look that is the military-ridden lower-class German's only protest against the treatment that falls to his lot. His eyes, heavy, dull, uninteresting, never moved, but stared straight before him, his mouth was slightly ajar, as if with sheer vacuity.

McArthur, studying him, doubted that this unsavoury looking man, could possibly be the smart English Gen-

eral, whose photographs were so familiar to him. To shave any man's head will go an amazingly long way towards changing his appearance. But it struck McArthur that, in this case, the experiment might have been a dangerous one. For the pinkish skull, under the dirty cap, was to his eye very un-Teutonic in shape. The characteristic German flatness at the back of the skull—which is to the eyes of other nations something almost revolting—was not here. There was a well-defined outward curve from the nape of the neck to the crown of the head, and the temples were well moulded and delicate.

These two men could not talk together, of course, but McArthur made a mental note of these things, to tell his friend, when they were in safety.

Kelly for his part was thrilled from head to foot. He would address the soldier; he would try to find out his plan, and ask his permission to write the history of his exploit for publication in America after its hero's return home. Already he saw himself the recipient of congratulations from all his friends, of some splendid remuneration, and still better, promotion: for surely he had done a clever thing in piercing this so excellently worn disguise. The car stopped with a jerk, the people tramped out, and presently the two Americans were once more following the soldier down the comparatively—more than comparatively—dark street.

Suddenly McArthur stopped. "That's that same cab following us still," he said. "Can you hear? The horse is a little lame."

"Nonsense, come along. We mustn't lose sight of our man."

But McArthur continued to stand still. They were in a very dark place, in the shadow of a buttress of a church; and in the quiet, the clop, clop, of the lame horse, and the harsh grinding of the unrubbered wheels ap-

proached them rapidly. "Do you see? They've lost us—they are stopping," McArthur whispered, seizing his companion's arm.

And, indeed, the cab pulled up within a stone's throw of them. A man's voice whispered eagerly in German. "Well, Ass, where are they? They have gone, you have lost them!"

Another voice, the cabman's, answered patiently in a beery drawl. "Nein, Mein Herr! They can't be far, I saw them only a minute ago," and the cab passed, the burly figure of the driver bending forward, as he peered into the gloom.

Kelly stared after them. "Well, I'm damned. You're right, Mac, they're after us, but who in hell can they be?" They walked on rapidly, puzzled what to do, between the fear of losing the man they were following, and of being discovered by the man who was following them.

After a hurried consultation they decided to separate; and Kelly, who was an excellent runner, slipped off his boots, and flew along one side of the street, while McArthur followed him as rapidly and quietly as he could on the other. A few minutes later McArthur came up with his friend, who was sitting in a doorway lacing up his boots, and still panting a little.

"It's all right," Kelly whispered. "They are in that house over there, and the cab has gone."

"Well, what are we to do next?" McArthur grumbled, "we can't afford to get the police after us, and it looks a pretty queer business. Come along, Tom, let's go home."

Kelly laughed excitedly. "Not on your life! The place is a saloon of some kind—look through the shutters, and you'll see! And I'm going in."

It was arranged that McArthur should stay outside

and that if anything occurred he would tap on the window. For the table, where his friend would be sitting, was near that window which was open, and the sill only a couple of feet from the ground, so that if anything should happen, it would be an easy matter for Kelly to wrench open the blind and jump out. They hadn't the slightest idea in what quarter of the town they were, but it was evident from the sound of the traffic, and an occasional clanging of trams, that they were within a stone's throw of some big street.

Kelly cocked his straw hat over his right ear, in a way that he had before entering into any exciting situation, and walked towards the door. At the steps he paused. "Did I tell you," he whispered, "who that guy was in the cab?"

"No."

"Well, he was that artist-looking chap with the red beard, who jostled us coming out of the music-hall."

* * * * *

McArthur walked up and down a few times, his thin-soled American boots making almost no noise on the dust of the neglected roadway. It was a curious position, but what seemed to him the oddest circumstance of all was, that the red-bearded man in the velvet coat should have followed them as he undoubtedly had done. It was hardly possible that he could have heard the few words Kelly and he had exchanged about the foot-soldier, for they had spoken in an undertone, and under cover of particularly noisy music; so why had this total stranger taken this trouble, at that time of night, to follow them what must have been a distance of at least two miles?

The little street was very quiet, only a few windows were still lighted, and it was almost pleasant to the watching man, to hear the peaceful buzz of voices coming out through the closely closed shutters of the little

café. Presently he took off his hat, and applied his eye to the crack near the table, where he knew he should find his friend. Kelly was sitting there, just as they had arranged, but opposite him, instead of the foot-soldier, sat, to McArthur's surprise, the man with the red beard. The two were talking in low voices and McArthur heard Kelly say in a hearty tone—

"Well, I'm an American and I can speak for my country. Except for a few people on the East Coast, we are pro-German to a man."

The reply was lost as somebody moved a chair, and McArthur went to the other window and looked in there. From this point he could see the whole of the room except the corner he had just left, and to his amazement he became aware that the foot-soldier was not in the room at all. Beside his friend, and the man in the velvet jacket, there were only two customers: a superior working-man of some kind was drinking punch with a girl; and behind a little desk, exactly opposite where McArthur stood, sat the proprietor, a white-faced, weary-eyed, shapeless old man, who looked more than half asleep.

And it was just then that a stream of light, flung out from an uncurtained upper window, startled the watcher, and he tiptoed softly across the street, and gazing up saw the man they had followed from the music-hall. The night had become very sultry, and clouds half covered the sky; it was warm and oppressive even in the street, and McArthur was not at all surprised, when the foot-soldier, approaching the window, drew up a chair and sat down by it. McArthur was in a deep shadow, and the man was looking away from him, so that he got him in profile.

"Why doesn't the damn fool get out of the light if he is the Englishman!" And then, as the man at the

window sat on, believing himself to be in perfect solitude, the American became gradually convinced that Kelly had been right. This man, whose stupid, dull face was gradually sharpening into an expression of intelligence and deep thought, was no German Infantry man.

McArthur was conscious of an access of great nervousness. What did the fellow, with his life in his hands, mean by sitting in an open window and looking like that? And then, coming from round the corner, the American caught the sound of footsteps—heavy German footsteps—and heard the voice of a man talking.

The man upstairs, engrossed in his meditations, obviously heard nothing, but sat on—his distinguished, clever face shining through his disguise, in a way that would have attracted the most casual attention. The footsteps came nearer. McArthur was paralysed with fear. One minute, and the brave man upstairs would be seen, and from his being seen to his capture and his eventual, certain, humiliating death would be only a question of time. At the last moment, just as the heavy footsteps, which he knew to be those of night watchmen, reached the corner the American snatched from his head his stiff, heavy straw hat and sent it whizzing through the open window. He then dashed into a dark doorway, turning his back that his face might not show, and listened while the footsteps died away.

When he dared look round he saw, as he had expected, that there was no light in the window. He sat down on the dark doorstep and collected his thoughts. If they had been mistaken, and the man was a simple German soldier, he himself was in a very awkward position, with his hat, with the name of the American firm in its crown, somewhere in that sinister-looking old house, and Kelly probably making an ass of himself in the café.

He had arrived at no plan, when the door opposite

opened and the foot-soldier, his cap on his head, shambled out. Turning to the left he went slowly up the street, and then waited round the corner, until McArthur walked towards him.

"Is this your hat?" the man asked stupidly in some German dialect.

McArthur nodded. "Yes, it is."

"Gut!" returned the soldier with a clumsy salute, and turned away. The American laid his hand on his arm. "Listen," he said, "we saw you at the music-hall, and my friend recognised you; he is an American journalist, and interviewed you once in London."

The man stared stupidly at him without a glimmer of recognition of the meaning of his words.

"Pardon," he muttered politely. Then McArthur leaned forward, and whispered two words—the famous English General's name.

There was a long pause, and then the General said in English: "Who are you?"

"I am an American citizen, and a pro-Ally to the end of my toes." There was that in his voice that carried unquestioning conviction; and the two men walked quietly up the deserted street—in the middle of it, for greater safety from hearers—and talked.

"My friend—did you notice him?—a wiry chap with red hair—he spotted you and we followed you all the way. He is inside now, in the café. Didn't you go inside the café at all?"

The Englishman shook his head, "No, I never do; I am supposed to be the nephew of the proprietor's dead wife; one of our prisoners you understand, with whom I talked. I am perfectly safe here as far as this house goes."

"Humph, there is another funny thing," went on McArthur. "Kelly and I were followed by another man,

who came in a cab, and he is in there now. Looks like a painter or something—red beard.”

The General started. “Red beard! Velvet jacket! Was he at that music-hall?”

“Yes, do you know him?”

They spoke in German because it was safer, but they seemed very close together, very intimate, these two strangers, whose mother-tongue was the same.

The Englishman shook his head. “I don’t know the fellow, never saw him before, so far as I know, but—he knows me. Let’s go back and have a look at him through the shutters. You may know him if you get a good look at him.”

And back they went through the darkness, the hot night air weighing down on them, and took up their stand at the shutter. Kelly and his new friend were still sitting there, two bottles of Rhine wine empty before them. The other two customers had gone, and the old proprietor was now sound asleep and snoring. The Englishman stood for a long time, peeping in through the crack, and when he drew back McArthur saw in the faint light filtering through the shutters that his dirty face was pale as death.

“What is the matter?”

“Nothing!”

“What are you going to do?”

“I have got to clear out of this now.”

McArthur protested. “Surely that’ll arouse suspicion? Why not go upstairs and go to bed, and leave in the morning on some pretext?”

The strangeness of the situation had occurred to neither of them, or how odd it was that this insignificant little American journalist should be advising the great soldier!

The Englishman shook his head. “No,” he said. “You

would be right if it was only your friend there that is following me, but it isn't only him."

* * * * *

A few minutes later, McArthur pushed open the little door of the café and went in, his shoes grating on the sandy floor. Kelly looked up surprised, and apparently not particularly pleased by his arrival.

Slowly he said, "Is that you, Mac?"

McArthur nodded, and advancing towards him said over the red-bearded man's head: "Kitty's worse, Tom, but don't be alarmed. I've just telephoned the doctor and he says we had better go back at once."

Kelly nodded. "Oh, is she? Poor girl. That's my sister," he added in a friendly tone, to the man in the velvet jacket, who hadn't turned.

"Yes," McArthur added, quickly. "The doctor fears it's scarlet fever."

The high shoulders under the velvet jacket made a nervous movement, and the man drew his chair roughly back from the table. "You didn't mention scarlet fever to me," he said in a curiously authoritative voice.

Kelly rose slowly. "No," he said. "I never thought of it. We've been talking politics, haven't we, not my domestic affairs. Afraid of infection?"

McArthur shot a warning look at him to which he instantly responded, adding to the stranger, "You needn't be alarmed. I haven't been in the room with her since this morning, and I've been in the open air ever since."

As they went out they stopped at the desk, and Kelly paid for their wine. "Who's the man," McArthur asked distinctly of the sleepy old proprietor, "who is sitting in the open window upstairs just over the house-door?"

"Oh, that is my nephew—a dummer Kerl from Swabia." The three men went quietly out into the street, and both of the Americans noticed that the German

cast a hasty glance up at the window, which of course was unlighted.

"Was that where the man was sitting?" the Red Beard asked.

"Yes, he was reading a letter as I came in. Lucky chap, I suppose he is in bed by now! Well," he added briskly, "we have got to get off home now. Can you tell us where we can catch the nearest tram to the Max Karl Strasse?"

The man grumbled something in an undertone, and then added audibly that in the big street round the corner they would undoubtedly find some kind of conveyance.

The three walked on together; the trams had stopped running, but presently a dilapidated droschky crawled along towards them, and the Americans hailed it and invited their new acquaintance to get in.

"We'll drive you wherever you like to go," McArthur declared with his new air of rather boisterous friendliness that surprised Kelly.

But the man with the red beard was, it seemed, disposed to walk.

"You needn't be frightened about the scarlet fever," McArthur laughed. "We ought to go and have a drink somewhere before we part for the night. Come along," he added, bluffly, dragging the other man by the left arm.

"Verflucht! Stop it!" the man cried in a voice of intense anger and almost hatred.

Kelly, watching the little scene in perplexity, was amazed at his friend's manner. "I beg your pardon," McArthur answered; "I haven't the slightest wish to offend you. If you knew how we Americans love everything that's German, you would not suspect me of anything worse than stupidity. Won't you let us drive you home, or at least part of the way?"

The man with the red beard bowed stiffly. "No, thanks, I will walk. I am very glad," he added, turning to Kelly, "that we have had this amusing little talk, and I hope you will find it useful in some of your articles."

Kelly took out a cigarette. "I certainly shall," he answered. "There is nothing the American public like more than articles about *people*, and the things your friend told you about the royal family have surely never been published before." He tapped his breast-pocket and turned to McArthur. "This gentleman, who is an artist, has a friend employed at the Court; and I have several pages of shorthand notes about the private life of the Kaiser and his family."

"That will be an eye-opener to the thick-headed English who believe such rubbish about the Kaiser," agreed McArthur.

"Well, we must be off," Kelly put in. "In you get, Mac. Gute nacht, mein Herr," bowing in the formal German way.

Kelly saluted, and the other man touched the brim of his wideawake. The two Americans then drove off, leaving the German standing in the street looking after them. "Well, what on earth is it all about?" Kelly burst out irrepressibly. "Why the devil did you come barging in just when I was beginning to draw him? Wonderful chap he was too, knew an awful lot about the swells."

McArthur laughed softly. "It was a very good thing you rose to the Kitty dodge; she has been useful, that imaginary Kitty, sometimes, hasn't she? Look here, Jim, had you ever seen that man before?"

Kelly grinned as he lit a fresh cigarette.

"Well, I guess I had, and so had you!"

"When did you recognise him?"

"I recognised his hand a few minutes after I went in. The other chap was not there, you see, so I sat down

by him. Do you know who that fellow is? Well, he is one of the very biggest Secret Service men in Germany: what do you think of that?" he added triumphantly, and before McArthur could answer he had leaned forward and instructed the driver to turn and drive back to the Seven Antlered Stag.

"No, no," cried McArthur, "we are not going there! We are going straight to my room."

"Nonsense, we are going back to interview that Englishman. I wouldn't miss that for anything on earth."

The coachman twisted round on his box and watched them fretfully, and McArthur lowered his voice, though they were speaking English, as he explained.

"The man we followed," he said, "is in my room at this minute, changing into my old blue serge suit. Go on to the Max Karl Strasse, Kutscher."

"But why—but why? What do you mean? Have you gone clean crazy."

They were both so excited, both talking so fast, so utterly at cross purposes, that the proverbial fly on the wall, would have rubbed his front feet together in amusement.

"I tell you the man we followed is at my room. Come on and see him," McArthur persisted.

Kelly burst out, opposing him.

"For God's sake be quiet, you idiot," McArthur murmured, grasping his friend's arm. "Remember we've got to hang on here till the last dog is hung, and remember that we are *pro*-Germans."

"Pro-hell," muttered Kelly, who occasionally resented his friend's exhortations to prudence. After a minute he went on: "Mac, why do you suppose that chap took the trouble to change his clothes before he went to the music-hall?"

"Change his clothes? What do you mean?"

They had reached a brilliantly lighted street by now, and were nearing McArthur's lodging. At sight of his friend's expression of bewilderment Kelly burst out laughing in triumph.

"Then you don't know who he was after all? Good! Well, he was the old professor, who talked with us in the restaurant. What do you think of that?"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am sure, I tell you. I noticed his hand, and I asked him point blank why he had changed, and guess what it was all about. He thought we were English spies! It appears he has been looking out for two fellows about our age who got into Germany through Switzerland, disguised as American reporters; so in order to quiet him I told him our names and all about us, and in return he gave me several columns of first-class stuff about the royal family, and some of the big ministers and generals."

"Did he tell you," asked McArthur, "that he was an important Secret Service man?"

Kelly chuckled. "He owned up to it when I told him he was."

The old cab stopped with a jerk, and a few minutes later, the two young men stood in McArthur's room. They had turned on the light on entering, and stood looking about them in silence for a few seconds. Everything was in perfect order, but there was a carefully dried-up mark of splashed water on the bare boards in front of the washing-stand, and a fire was burning in the cracked and chipped old porcelain stove.

"What's that smell?" Kelly asked. "It's like flannel being burned. And where is our man?"

McArthur opened the iron door of the stove, and a whiff of burning flew out from it. "That's all that is left of his clothes," he answered dryly. "He has washed

off his complexion, and he has taken my clothes, and he is on his way, though not very far, to England by this time."

Kelly's jaw dropped ridiculously, and McArthur, thoroughly enjoying the pull he was having over his more brilliant friend, pointed to the little bookshelf in the corner.

"If you'll get out Treitschke's little masterpiece on the art of war," McArthur went on, locking the door, "you will find some further information."

Mechanically Kelly obeyed, and opening the book took out half a sheet of notepaper which he handed to his friend, who read it and without a word handed back to him. Written very neatly in a small, fine writing, were these words in French—

"You have probably saved my life, oh young man of the winged helmet. I shall not forget."

Kelly stared. "Winged! What the deuce is a winged helmet?"

McArthur pushed him onto the bed. "Sit down and rest, and try to brace up. The winged helmet," he added, pointing to his old straw hat that he had hung on the back of the chair, "is there." Then he told his story.

". . . I really think I nearly fainted when he turned round from the chink in the shutter and told me who the fellow was."

Kelly stared at him. "Then he is some big man?"

"He would tell you he is the biggest man in the world, but there are people who don't think so, Tommy, my lad. The old professor and the man of the red beard is no other than Wilhelm, by the Grace of God the Greatest Man on Earth and the Peace Angel."

"Gee!" muttered Kelly.

"Yes, he has always done this Haroun al-Raschid business, dressing up and going about incognito. Of course,

loads of people knew about it, and he is always within safe distance of several detectives. Rivington told me that it was a favourite trick before the War for people to pretend not to recognise him, but to-night, of course, he was really doing genuine spy work. I don't know how he found out that Rivington was in town; I suppose probably just recognised him as you did at the music-hall; Rivington spotted him as some one he had seen, but didn't recognise him till the lamplight shone through his beard at the café."

"My Lord!" yelled Kelly, suddenly clutching a bunch of red hair on either side of his head, and wrenching at it as if he were trying to pull it out. "To think I had him there in my power, and didn't even have some fun out of it."

McArthur groaned. "You idiot. Are you ever going to realise that every day as long as the War goes on our position here is going to get harder and harder? You'd have spoilt everything if you had known who he was. Thank God, I have got a little common sense. So that to-night's adventure, besides being quite good enough even for me, will have done us good if anything. The little All Highest knows our real names and addresses. Our rooms will be thoroughly searched to-morrow, and nothing will be found, and General Rivington got in and out without being seen. He promised to let me know if he met anybody, and he has said nothing, so it is all right."

"He'll put us in a book," murmured Kelly gloomily. "He'll tell the whole adventure, no man on earth could resist it, and I've lost my scoop."

McArthur rose: "Now you're going off to bed, my son, and he won't put it in a book, having no particular wish to ruin us; and you can use your scoop, unless I'm very much mistaken, before very long."

"What do you mean?" asked the dejected one, putting on his hat.

McArthur held open the door, and held out his hand. "I mean, sonny, that it won't be long before we Americans are in this little scrap too, and you can write what you like, and publish what you like when once you get home to God's own country."

* * * * *

Half-an-hour later, Kaiser Wilhelm II, clothed in a dressing-gown, sat in the small Spartan bedroom he affects, finishing the dictated account of his evening's adventure to an asthmatic young man in spectacles. "Thus, by the Grace of God," the All Highest concluded, "and by the special gifts that it has pleased Him to confer on me, I have been able to confer on my country the blessings contingent on the capture of this low spy, General Sir Claude Rivington, who has been my guest and eaten my bread and my salt, and who has rewarded my friendliness with this unheard-of treachery. Knowing that the Seven Antlered Stag is at this moment being surrounded by my faithful police, conscious that probably, even as I write, this most dishonourable English General is being captured, I will say my prayers.

"I thank God for all His mercies, and I am conscious that before long He will make me the ruler of the whole of Middle Europe. That will do for to-night, Von Mayer."

The asthmatical young man backed out of the room, and a few moments later the German Kaiser, happy in one of his soon-to-be-destroyed illusions, went to sleep. And far away in a flying train sat General Rivington, even now, thanks to his incomparable knowledge of German ways and means, in comparative safety.

And the stars that looked down over Berlin, also looked down on little England lying girt in its silver sea. ✓

W.C.





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